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BIBLE STUDIES.

Contributions, chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions, to the History of the Language, Literature, and Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity.

BY

PROF. G. ADOLF DEISSMANN,
HEIDELBERG.

Authorised Translation (incorporating Dr. DEISSMANN'S most recent changes and additions) by Rev. A. GRIEVE, M.A., Ph.D.

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NEW LIGHT ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

FROM RECORDS OF THE GRÆCO-ROMAN PERIOD

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BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE AUTHOR'S MS.

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JAMES HOPE MOULTON
GRAMMATICO PATRE DIGNO

PREFACE

THE following pages originated in a course of lectures given at the Hochstift, Frankfort-on-Maine, in January and February, 1905. They were first published in English in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, vol. xviii., October 1906–April 1907, and have since been carefully revised.

The indices have been made by my friend and colleague, Mr. Strachan, who is also the translator.

With reference to the wish expressed on page 52, I may add that a splendid collection of private letters of the Ptolemaic period has recently been published by Stanislaus Witkowski: *Epistulæ privatæ græcæ quæ in papyris ætatis Lagidarum servantur*, Leipzig (Teubner), 1906.

ADOLF DEISSMANN.

HEIDELBERG, *6th May* 1907.

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NEW LIGHT ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

FROM RECORDS OF THE GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD

I.

THE PROBLEM.

THE nature of the problem before us—the illustration of the New Testament by recently discovered texts of the Græco-Roman world—requires perhaps a word of explanation, chiefly because it is not self-evident from the title of our investigation precisely which texts are meant. It will, however, be at once apparent that a study is proposed of the sources from which we are able to reconstruct the historical background of the New Testament and, consequently, of Primitive Christianity.

The historical background of Primitive Christianity is the ancient world, the ancient world in the widest sense of the term, Eastern as well as Western. Not alone the Eastern, and certainly

not alone the Western world, but the one, great, civilized world around the Mediterranean, which under the Roman Empire displays a unified structure, so far as the Hellenizing and Romanizing of the East and the Orientalizing of the West had worked in the direction of unity.

Any one who wishes to reconstruct this great background to the transformation that took place in the world's religion, will have recourse particularly to the literatures of the imperial age, and to the literatures of the previous epoch, so far as they were living forces influencing the spirit of that age. Two groups of literary remains have especially to be considered: on the one hand, the fragments of Jewish tradition preserved in the Mishna, the Talmuds, and other allied texts; and, on the other hand, the Græco-Roman writers of the Empire.

Great, however, as is the importance of all these literary materials, it is not of them that we are to speak here. A scholar might well make it his lifework to re-edit, with the resources of modern archæology, the splendid edition of the New Testament published a century and a half ago by Wettstein, with its parallel passages from Jewish, Greek, and Roman literature; but, all things considered, there are at present so many Christian and Jewish theologians engaged in investigating the ancient Jewish literature—the Christian with less

prejudice, and the Jewish with better methods than formerly—and, similarly, there are so many busy workers employed on the Græco-Roman literature of the imperial period, that we are already acquainted with large portions of the literary background of Primitive Christianity. These literary remains, moreover, are in such high estimation that numbers of people are more or less unconsciously of opinion that the historical background of Primitive Christianity may be completely restored from the literature of the imperial age.

They forget that the literature, even if it were preserved in its entirety, is only a fragment, though an important one, of the ancient world. They forget that every reconstruction of the ancient world attempted by means of the literary texts merely is bound to be one-sided, and that comparisons drawn between Primitive Christianity and this fragmentary reconstruction of a fragmentary world may easily fail of success. Only a few years ago a scholar so acute and learned as Eduard Norden,[1] in an estimate of Primitive Christianity from the philological and literary points of view, set up contrasts between the Apostle Paul and the ancient world which are in fact nothing but

[1] *Die antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*, Leipzig, 1898. Cf. a criticism of this book in the *Theol. Rundschau*, 1902, v. pp. 66 ff.

contrasts between the non-literary prose and the artistic literary prose—contrasts that have nothing to do with the opposition between Primitive Christianity and the ancient world.

The following pages are to be regarded as an attempt towards supplementing the historical background of Primitive Christianity, and at the same time as a protest against overestimating the worth of the literary evidence. We shall sketch the importance of the non-literary evidence of the imperial period, *i.e.* the innumerable texts on stone, metal, wax, papyrus, wood, or clay which have been rendered accessible by the archæological discoveries and researches of recent years, so far as they belong to the period of the rise and first development of Christianity, say, from the time of Augustus to Diocletian or Constantine. These texts have been made accessible to us chiefly in the last century, the century of archæology and epigraphy, as it might well be called; but so far from their being exhausted, the recognition of their importance for the historical understanding of Primitive Christianity is still by no means general. The cuneiform inscriptions have been drawn upon for years by Old Testament criticism, and by a combination of good work and puffery the problem of 'the cuneiform inscriptions and the Old Testament' has become so popular, and has been so often

handled, that the few scholars who have not yet committed themselves on this question ought really to form an alliance, in order to escape from an isolation that has become almost unbearable. Huge as the question is, we ought none the less to remember, amid the noise and dust of the great Babylonian work-ground, that the age which saw the rise of Christianity has also left written monuments, which as a whole possess an importance for the understanding of the New Testament similar to that possessed by the cuneiform inscriptions for the study of the Old Testament, save that the importance does not lie so much on the surface and is not so easily made plain to every distinguished layman.

In studying these monuments we have something more to do than merely to take the evidence of the witnesses for the Roman period. As a matter of fact the literary remains are supplemented by an entirely new group, of quite new importance historically. The literary remains are essentially the witness of the upper or cultured class; the lower class is seldom heard of, and where it chances to appear, as, for instance, in Comedy, it is generally seen in the light reflected on it from above. The old Jewish literature, it is true, has preserved, along with an excess of the cultured, learned, dogmatic element, much that

belongs to the people—the rabbinical texts are a veritable mine for the folklorist—but the Græco-Roman literature of the imperial period can only be described as on the whole the reflex of the ruling, powerful, educated class; and this upper class has nearly always been identified with the ancient world under the emperors. Compared with Primitive Christianity, advancing from the East with the force of a volcanic eruption, this upper class presents the same enfeebled, senile appearance as every other upper class, and the signs of approaching dissolution are clearly visible. This observation, once made, was held to apply to the whole civilized world at the time of the new religious movement, and thus the gloomy picture originated which is usually drawn whenever the attempt is made to exhibit the ancient background of Primitive Christianity. But it is here that the great mistake has been made, the mistake of a fatal generalization. The upper class has been confounded with the whole body of society; Primitive Christianity—to vary the mode of expression—has been compared with an incommensurable quantity. The social structure of Primitive Christianity points emphatically to the lower, occasionally to the middle class. Primitive Christianity stands in but slight relationship to the upper class at the beginning. Jesus of Nazareth

was a carpenter, Paul of Tarsus a tentmaker, and the testimony of St. Paul at the close of the first chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, as to the origin of his congregations in the lower class of the great towns, is one of the most important historical witnesses to Primitive Christianity. Primitive Christianity teaches the lesson taught by every return of spring-time—that the sap rises upwards from below. By its very nature Primitive Christianity stood contrasted with the upper class not at first as Christianity, but as a movement of the proletarian lower class. The corresponding pagan class is therefore alone commensurable with Primitive Christianity at the outset. This class, practically lost to the historian hitherto, has now, thanks to the discovery of its own written memorials, suddenly come forth from the rubbish-heaps of ancient cities, towns, and villages, and so loud and persistent are its cries to be heard, that it is absolutely necessary to accord it a quiet and fair hearing. This, in our opinion, is the widest, the most important significance of the non-literary texts of the imperial period—that they enable us to correct the one-sided view of the ancient world as seen from above, by setting us in the midst of the social class in which we must imagine St. Paul working, from which we must imagine Christianity making its first recruits. We must beware of

pressing this statement; of course, among the inscriptions and papyri of this period there are plenty that did not originate in the lower class, but were the work of officials, generals, statesmen, magistrates, and wealthy persons. But along with these documents there are the innumerable testimonies left by the middle and lower classes, generally recognizable at once as such by their contents or by the style of language—true memorials of the popular dialect, memorials of the petty affairs of petty individuals.

In several respects these texts yield important results for the study of the New Testament. Not only does the discovery of fragments of ancient Christian papyri enrich our store of MSS. of the New Testament and other early Christian writings, —and the direct value of the new finds in this respect is considerable,—but the non-Christian, non-literary texts especially possess indirect value of a threefold order. (1) They teach us the proper *philological* appreciation of the New Testament and Primitive Christianity; (2) they give us hints for the proper understanding of the New Testament as *literature*; (3) as concerns the history of *religion* they afford valuable information by making clear to us the points of contact and difference between Primitive Christianity and the ancient world.

One whole group of texts has been deliberately

omitted here, inasmuch as we shall in the main discuss only Greek and Latin evidence, to the exclusion of that in other languages, partly because to much of it the present writer could not give specialist treatment, but also because the great abundance of Greek and Latin texts imposes limitations. But we cannot refrain from mentioning one special class of evidence of the highest importance as regards the history of religion, namely, the numerous Semitic inscriptions from the province of Syria and the neighbouring lands to the East and North, which have made it possible to reconstruct, at least fragmentarily, the hitherto almost wholly unknown heathen cults existent in the first home of Christianity.

Before proceeding to our threefold task of demonstrating the importance of our texts in the history of language, of literature, and of religion, it will be necessary briefly to describe the texts themselves.

They may be divided, according to the material on which they are written, into three main classes. The division is a mechanical one, but is advisable for the simple reason that the texts as published are generally so classified already. We have to speak (1) of the *inscriptions* on stone, metal, wax-tablets; (2) of the texts on *papyrus*; (3) of the texts on potsherds and wooden tablets.

1. Let us look first at the *inscriptions*. The majority of them are inscriptions on stone, but there are also inscriptions cast in bronze or scratched on lead or gold plates, besides a few wax-tablets, the wall-scribblings called *graffiti*, and the coins and medals. The inscriptions, numbering some hundreds of thousands, are found over the whole extent of the civilized Græco-Roman world, from the Rhine to the Upper Nile, and from the Euphrates to Britain. They have long been the objects of attention,[1] but the nineteenth century was the first really epigraphical period. The study of epigraphy is represented by two names above all others: August Böckh in connexion with the Corpus Inscriptionum Græcarum, and Theodor Mommsen with the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Though the first-named corpus of Greek inscriptions is now out of date and is being replaced by fresh collections on the same extensive scale, yet without this first great attempt at systematization the brilliant development of

[1] Even in the interests of New Testament philology. It deserves to be remembered that even in the eighteenth century there was a theologian who turned Greek inscriptions to account in New Testament work: Joh. Ernst Imm. Walch, *Observationes in Matthæum ex græcis inscriptionibus*, Jena, 1779. In later times the English scholars, E. L. Hicks, Bishop Lightfoot, and most especially W. M. Ramsay, deserve honourable mention.

Greek epigraphy would not have been possible. The stock of inscriptions has been considerably increased by systematic excavations undertaken by great societies, and the student of the New Testament follows with especial interest the reports of the Austrian archæologists on the site of ancient Ephesus, those of the Germans at Pergamus, at Magnesia on the Mæander,[1] and other cities of Asia Minor, and those of the Americans at Corinth.[2] The new corpus of the Greek inscriptions of Asia Minor planned by the Vienna Academy is awaited with keen interest, for a large portion of the background of St. Paul's missionary journeys, and of the congregational life of the Primitive Christians, will be recoverable from this corpus. The collection entitled *Orientis græci inscriptiones selectæ*, edited

[1] The inscriptions of Pergamus [and in part those of the islands of the Ægean] have been investigated, as regards their bearing on the interpretation of the New Testament, by the present writer, *Neue Bibelstudien*, Marburg, 1897 (= *Bible Studies*, pp. 171–267, Edinburgh, 1901; second edition, 1903): those of Magnesia on the Mæander have been similarly investigated by Gottfried Thieme, *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Mäander und das Neue Testament* (a Heidelberg Dissertation), Göttingen, 1906.

[2] Among the first inscriptions from the American excavations, published by B. Powell in the *Amer. Journ. of Archæology*, 1903, 2nd ser. vol. vii. No. 1, there is an inscription (No. 40) of importance for Ac 18[4]. It was probably once part of an inscription over a gate [συν]αγωγὴ Εβρ[αίων].

by Wilhelm Dittenberger, and distinguished by the accuracy of its texts and commentary, is already a mine of information for Biblical scholars.

One fact occasionally detracts from the value of the inscriptions; they are often polished, artificial in phrase, cold as the marble on which they are inscribed, and stiff as the letters which the hard stone is fain to bear. On the whole they are far less fresh and naïve than the following group, which therefore, at least from the philological point of view, is the most important.

2. The *papyri*.[1] The sheet of papyrus was one of the most important writing materials in antiquity. It derives its name from the papyrus plant. This plant (*Cyperus papyrus*, L., *Papyrus antiquorum*, Willd.) occurs at the present day in Egypt, in Sicily, especially near Syracuse, and also in Lake Trasimene, and is cultivated probably in most botanical gardens. The papyrus has been used as a writing material from very ancient times. According to Kenyon,[2] the oldest inscribed papyrus that has been preserved is a sheet of accounts

[1] Cf. the article by the present author on 'Papyri' in the *Encycl. Biblica*, iii. cols. 3556 ff. (London, 1902), which has here been made use of, also the article on 'Papyri,' by F. G. Kenyon in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, Suppl. Vol. pp. 352 ff.

[2] *The Palæography of Greek Papyri*, p. 14.

from the reign of Assa, king of Egypt, whose date is approximately 3580–3536 B.C. From this remote time until late in the period of the Arab occupation of Egypt papyrus was the classic writing material of the Wonderland of the Nile—it has a history of roughly 5000 years. Though appearing, to the superficial glance, brittle and perishable, it is, in fact, as indestructible as the pyramids and obelisks, and the resurrection of ancient Egypt in our own times is largely owing to this wonderful toughness of the papyri.

There are plenty of false statements current about the manufacture of the sheets of papyrus. Even Gregory[1] writes that they were made from the 'bast' of the plant. That is not correct. Of the method of manufacture we possess a description by the elder Pliny,[2] which is rendered still more intelligible by the technical examination of the extant papyri. On this authority Kenyon[3] states as follows:—The pith of the stem of the papyrus plant was cut into thin strips, which were laid vertically side by side in the form of a sheet for writing. Above this was laid a horizontal

[1] *Textkritik des Neuen Testaments*, i. 7, Leipzig, 1900.

[2] *Nat. Hist.* xiii. 11–13. The description has been popularized by Georg Ebers in his *Kaiser Hadrian*. Cf. also Ebers, 'The Writing Material of Antiquity,' *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, New York, November, 1893.

[3] *Palæography*, p. 15.

cross-layer of the same strips. The two layers were glued together with a preparation in which the Nile water played a certain part. The sheets thus obtained were pressed, dried in the sun, and polished to remove any inequalities in the surface. They were then ready for use.

Even at the present day sheets of papyrus are made in a similar fashion. Professor Adalbert Merx informed the present writer that he met with a lady in Sicily in the autumn of 1902 who had learnt the manufacture of papyrus sheets from her father, and who still occasionally practised the art.

Considering the great importance of the papyrus in ancient life it is not at all remarkable that it is mentioned in Holy Scripture. The plant itself is named in Job 8^{11} and Is 35^{7}. Small boats of papyrus are mentioned in Ex 2^{3} and Is 18^{2}. As writing material it is mentioned by the author of the Second Epistle of St. John: the *χάρτης* in v.^{12} is no doubt a sheet of papyrus. When, further, in 2 Ti 4^{13}, the writer asks for *τὰ βιβλία*, but especially for *τὰς μεμβράνας*, doubtless by *βιβλία* papyrus books are to be understood.

Let us now glance at the recent discoveries of papyri and their importance to scholars.

Since 1778, when an unknown European dealer in antiquities bought from Egyptian peasants a papyrus containing documents of the year 191–

192 A.D., and saw how the peasants set light to some fifty others for the sake of the aromatic scent of the smoke,[1] the mysterious soil of the ancient civilization on the Nile has presented us with a vast wealth of papyri written in all sorts of languages and ranging over several thousand years. Between 1820 and 1840 a considerable number of papyri from Memphis and Letopolis in Middle Egypt, from This, Panopolis, Thebes, Hermonthis, Elephantine, and Syene in Upper Egypt, reached the European museums, but were not noticed by many scholars, and were read and made use of by very few indeed. Neglecting the single finds of other years, we come to the great discoveries in the Middle Egyptian province of El Faijûm in the year 1877. Then it was that the numerous mounds of ruins and rubbish-heaps north of the capital of the province, Medinet el Faijûm, the ruins of the ancient city called ἡ τῶν Κροκοδείλων πόλις, and later ἡ τῶν Ἀρσινοϊτῶν πόλις, yielded hundreds and thousands of precious leaves and fragments of leaves. From this time onward one great find has succeeded another, and we are even now in the midst of an important period of discovery. The most remarkable external feature of the discoveries is the fact that most of the papyri are turned up

[1] Wilcken, *Die griechischen Papyrusurkunden*, p. 10, which is also to be compared for what follows.

with the spade from the Egyptian rubbish-heaps. Just as excavations are undertaken for the foundations of ancient temples and for prehistoric potsherds, so now they are undertaken for papyri. Their being found in the rubbish of ancient cities gives a valuable hint as to their general character. We must regard the masses of papyri from Faijûm, Oxyrhynchus-Behnesa, etc., not as the relics of great archives, as they were at first thought to be, but as the remains of ancient rubbish-shoots, where ages ago the discarded files of documents from public and private offices, worn-out books and fragments of books, and such-like were thrown, there to await in tranquil repose the unsuspected fates in store for them.

The great bulk of the papyri are of a non-literary character: legal documents of the most various kinds, *e.g.* leases, accounts, and receipts, marriage contracts and wills, attestations, official edicts, petitions for justice, records of judicial proceedings, and a large number of documents relating to taxes, then letters and notes, exercise books, charms, horoscopes, diaries, etc. etc. The contents of these non-literary fragments are as varied as life itself. The Greek fragments, numbering many thousands, embrace a period of about a thousand years. The oldest go back to early Ptolemean times, *i.e.* the third century

B.C.;[1] the most recent carry us far into the Byzantine period. On these papyri the whole eventful history of Græco-Roman Egypt in those thousand years passes before our eyes. These Greek MSS., together with a large number of Demotic, Coptic, Arabic, Latin, Hebrew, and Persian, to say nothing of the old Hieroglyphic papyri, possess an importance for the study of antiquities, in the widest sense, about which there should be no possibility of a difference of opinion. They enable us to revive a long period of ancient life. They testify to the actual conditions of the past with a truth and candour that can be claimed for no ancient writer and for but very few ancient inscriptions. The ancient authors, even in the best of cases, have come down to us through several hands, and are liable to be more or less 'doctored' and 'improved.' The inscriptions are often cold and lifeless as the stone that bears them. The papyrus is something much more lifelike: we see the handwriting, the crabbed characters; we see the men who wrote them; we gaze into the nooks and crannies of private life, for which history has no

[1] There has even been found recently a Greek literary papyrus of the fourth century B.C., *The Persians* of the poet Timotheos, edited by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Leipzig, 1903. As reported by F. Blass in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, 1903, 655, B. Grenfell considers that the MS. was written between 330 and 280 B.C.

eyes and the historian no spectacles. These plain, unpretentious scraps of papyrus come as a stream of new, warm blood reanimating the history of law in the first place, but also the history of civilization in general, and more particularly the history of language. And, paradoxical as it seems to many, the non-literary papyri have more value than the literary for the great task of historical investigation. By all means let us rejoice when the soil of Egypt presents us with ancient books and fragments of books, especially when it restores to us lost pearls of literature. But for scholars the real treasure in the field of the Egyptian peasants is not the relics of ancient art and literature hidden there, but the relics of ancient life, in all its actuality, tangible actuality, only waiting to be requickened. It is therefore to be regretted that while every scrap of an ancient book is treated with veneration and immediately published and reproduced in facsimile, even if it is only a fragment of one of the writers who are deservedly forgotten, the non-literary pieces, on the other hand, are often only published in part. A single trifling lease may, for instance, contain a verbal form constituting the long-sought link between some form in the early Κοινή and a form in a modern Greek dialect derived from it.

A word or two is necessary about published papyri. Their number is legion. They are named

after the place where they are now kept (*e.g.* the Berlin, London, Paris, Geneva, Heidelberg, Strassburg, Leipzig, and other papyri),[1] after their owners (*e.g.* the Archduke Rainer's Papyri and the Amherst Papyri), or after the places where they were found (*e.g.* Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Tebtunis Papyri). The last method is undoubtedly the most scientific, and would always be possible where large quantities of papyri have been found at one place and afterwards kept together. In any case, it should never be forgotten in citing a single papyrus, to state the place and time of its being written; the excellence of these texts as sources depends in no small measure on the fact that to a large extent they can be dated to the year and the day, and that their place of origin is nearly always determinable. The compilation of a Corpus or several Corpora Papyrorum is reserved for the future; at present it is impossible to collect the results of discoveries that are still in progress.[2]

In view of the exaggerated esteem in which

[1] Of late papyri have also been acquired by numerous American libraries and museums; cf. the list in vol. iv. of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, pp. 265–271, London, 1904.

[2] A new and excellent bibliography of the papyri and the literature founded on them is that by N. Hohlwein, *La papyrologie grecque. Bibliographie raisonnée* (*Ouvrages publiés avant le* 1^er^ *janvier* 1905), Louvain, 1905. He notices over 800 papyrological works.

literary texts are held, it is not surprising that theological students have felt themselves chiefly enriched by the fragments of Biblical and early Christian books. It is certainly true that we have every cause to be grateful for the increase of our store of sources and textual apparatus from the venerable primitive age of our faith. The most important of the Greek fragments are enumerated in the above-named articles by Kenyon and the present writer. It must be admitted that the direct additions to our knowledge by these literary finds are very considerable. But of this we will not speak here; our subject deals with the value of the non-literary papyri, with the indirect results yielded by these texts to Biblical research. With this the following chapters will be concerned. It may, however, be mentioned in these introductory remarks that as early as 1841, H. W. J. Thiersch, in his work *De Pentateuchi versione Alexandrina*, pointed out the importance of the then almost unknown papyri for the study of the Septuagint; and that the papyri have been made use of for the Septuagint and the New Testament, by P. W. Schmiedel in his revision of Winer's *Grammar*; by the present author in his *Bibelstudien*, *Neue Bibelstudien*,[1] and other writings; by F. Blass in

[1] Both in English as one book, *Bible Studies*, Edinburgh, 1901; 2nd ed. 1903.

his *Grammatik des Neutestamentlichen Griechisch*; by James Hope Moulton in many excellent essays in *The Classical Review* and *The Expositor*, and most recently in the brilliant first volume of his *Grammar*;[1] by W. Heitmüller,[2] Th. Nägeli,[3] and other scholars.

3. Closely related to the papyri is the third main group[4] of texts, the inscribed potsherds, or *Ostraca*. Here we are speaking of an infant science, borne hitherto on the shoulders of two men, U. Wilcken, of Halle, and W. E. Crum, of London. The former laid the foundations in his brilliant work entitled *Griechische Ostraka aus Ægypten und Nubien*;[5] the latter, in his *Coptic Ostraca*,[6] contributed new material, of importance also to the Greek scholar.

What are ostraca? Inscribed potsherds. Why has no notice been taken of them before? 'Only

[1] *A Grammar of New Testament Greek, based on W. F. Moulton's edition of G. B. Winer's Grammar.* Vol. I. Prolegomena. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906).

[2] *Im Namen Jesu*, Göttingen, 1903.

[3] *Der Wortschatz des Apostels Paulus*, Göttingen, 1905.

[4] As for the other smaller groups (wooden-tablets, wax-tablets, etc.), what is here said about the inscriptions on stone, the papyri, and the ostraca, applies *mutatis mutandis* also to them.

[5] Two volumes, Leipzig, 1899. Cf. the review in the *Theologische Literaturzeiting*, 1901, xxvi. cols. 65 ff.

[6] London, 1902; cf. V. Hilprecht, *The Sunday School Times*, 1902, No. 42, vol. 44, p. 560.

bits of earthenware and smoked cigar-ends are absolutely worthless,' writes Pastor von Bodelschwingh in the ninth annual report of a society for collecting 'unconsidered trifles' for the Bethel Institute near Bielefeld. So thought the Egyptian peasants also, at least with regard to the potsherds, when the miserable remains of earthenware vessels fell into their hands while overhauling ancient heaps of ruins, only to be thrown away immediately. And many a European specialist must have been fully persuaded of the worthlessness of ancient potsherds, even when they were marked with written characters, or why were they for a comparatively long time practically ignored by investigators? What is there more contemptible than an earthen potsherd? The pathetic irony of the prophet found no expression of the insignificance of man more appropriate than the metaphor of the potsherd among the other potsherds.[1]

Before Wilcken's book appeared few of us were aware that the potsherds in ancient times were not only thrown away, but often found their way back from the rubbish-heaps to the houses and cottages to serve as writing material for the lower classes. We had heard at school of the judgment of

[1] 'Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth!' (Is 45^{9}, R.V.).

Cleisthenes by potsherds, but were generally left with the impression that ostracism was a special invention of the Athenian statesman, and that for the purpose of voting he had had small clay writing-tablets manufactured. Meanwhile three of these Cleisthenes-ostraca have been found at Athens, and at least two of them prove without doubt to be fragments of vessels. Wilcken then shows with luminous proofs that the use of ostraca for writing on may be regarded as customary at Athens at least as early as the sixth century B.C., and that in the Mediterranean lands generally the potsherd was a favourite writing materal in ancient times. For the Hellenistic period this is proved by several quotations from the writers of the time, and further by the thousands of inscribed potsherds of the same date safeguarded for us by the hot, dry soil of Egypt, to which we also owe the preservation of the papyri for thousands of years. As a consequence of the changes of race in the valley of the Nile these potsherds are covered with all kinds of writing, native Egyptian (Hieratic and Demotic), Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Coptic, and Arabic.

The Greek ostraca, extending over a period of about a thousand years, from the time of the first Ptolemies until the beginning of the Arab dominion, have so far proved the most numerous. They are

inscribed with texts of the most varied contents—letters, contracts, accounts, orders to pay, edicts, and even copies of classical authors. Roughly speaking, therefore, the inscribed ostraca supply us with the same sort of texts as we already possess in such astonishing abundance in the papyri, except that from the nature of things the texts on potsherds are generally shorter than those on papyrus. Most of the ostraca consist of receipts for taxes.

No less than 1624 of these humble documents of antiquity have been published by Ulrich Wilcken in the second book of his great work. Of these, 1355, not previously published, had been brought to light by himself, with immense pains, in the museums of Berlin, London, Paris, Rome, Turin, Leyden, etc.,[1] as well as in private collections. A task of the greatest difficulty awaited the editor in the decipherment of the cursive handwriting on these ostraca, elaborated as it often is to a grotesque degree and employing innumerable abbreviations and ligatures, but the acknowledged skill of the decipherer of the Berlin Papyri proved brilliantly equal to the demands made upon it. Thus these homely texts are now in the hands of scholars, not altogether freed from puzzles and

[1] The University Library of Heidelberg also came into possession of a large collection of ostraca in 1905.

mysteries, but available without any trouble for the purposes of research.

The ostraca are in a still greater degree than the papyri documents of the lower class of the population. The potsherd was the cheapest possible writing material, such as everybody could fetch for himself from the rubbish-heap free of cost. The ostracon was therefore considered below the social dignity of well-to-do people; and it is interesting to note how in many Coptic letters that are written on potsherds[1] the writers beg their correspondents to excuse their having to use an ostracon for want of papyrus. The embarrassment of these polite persons is matter of congratulation for us, for the ostraca lead us into the very midst of the class of society in which Primitive Christianity took root.

Having given a short account of our texts, we we will now proceed to place our venerable Holy Book beside the open pages of the folios that deal with the inscriptions, the papyri, and the ostraca. We are thus restoring the New Testament from its Western exile to its Eastern home, taking it from the domain of our modern civilization, that has founded hundreds of professorial chairs for the learned exposition of this one small Book, and placing it again in the society of unlearned and

[1] Cf. Crum, *Coptic Ostraca*, p. 97.

unsophisticated men. Let us hear what these witnesses from the society in which the New Testament had its origin have to say to the scholar who makes that Book his study.

II.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEXTS FOR THE PHILOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The first great fact that impresses the investigator is that the New Testament speaks practically the same language as was spoken by simple and unlearned men of the imperial age. That is the first and most easily proven example of the importance of our texts, namely, that they have for the first time made the New Testament intelligible from the point of view of the historian of language. This thesis, when first maintained ten years ago, met with more or less lively opposition in theological and philological circles, but professional opinion has since then become so much enlightened that at the present time the whole science of New Testament philology is being revolutionized, and all workers at this subject are agreed that historical investigation of the language of the New Testament must begin with the language

of the papyri, inscriptions, etc. In the latest annual report on the progress of classical antiquities,[1] Professor Witkowski, of Lemberg, reviewed the work already done, and came to the conclusion that the language of the New Testament must be considered in its connexion with the language of the texts we are discussing. Some other scholars may be mentioned. A short time ago Theodor Nägeli, a Swiss schoolmaster, formerly a pupil of Professor Wackernagel, of Göttingen, published a study of the vocabulary of St. Paul.[2] Page after page of this study is a confirmation of the thesis we have mentioned; page after page the young scholar regards St. Paul in the light of the texts, and he has succeeded, probably for the first time, in criticizing the language of the great apostle of the Gentiles as it must be criticized. Similarly, in James Hope Moulton's *Prolegomena*,[3] there is page after page in proof of our thesis, and Professor Wackernagel himself has recently spoken in terms of agreement.[4]

The point is this. The original language of the New Testament is Greek. Every one is familiar

[1] *Jahresbericht über die Fortschritte der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 1904, i. Bd. cxx. pp. 153–256.

[2] See above, p. 21.

[3] See above, p. 21.

[4] In the important essay on 'Die griechische Sprache,' in the great cyclopædic work entitled *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, Leipzig, 1905, i. 8. pp. 303 ff.

with this statement, and yet it is wanting in precision. It is true the scholar's working text of the New Testament is in Greek, but there are separate portions of the New Testament that were not originally written in Greek, but in a Semitic dialect. The Man from whom the decisive impulse went forth, Jesus of Nazareth, did not speak Greek in His public ministry, but the language of His native land of Galilee, Aramaic, a dialect cognate but not identical with Hebrew. Thus the gospel was first preached in Aramaic. We hear a last echo of the original words when we read in our Bibles words like mammon, talitha cumi, abba, or names like Barabbas, Martha, etc., which are all part of this ancient Aramaic. So, too, the oldest transcript of the words of Jesus was probably Aramaic, written for the Aramaic-speaking Christians of Palestine. Unfortunately this first record of the words of Jesus is lost in its original Aramaic dress. What would we not give to recover one thin papyrus book with the first Aramaic sayings of Jesus? We can imagine ourselves cheerfully sacrificing the whole theological literature of a century, for that one slender volume.

But such speculation is useless. It is better to ask, How is it that we no longer possess the sayings of Jesus in the original Aramaic? The answer is, Because Christianity became a world religion. An

Aramaic gospel in the hands of the Christian missionary meant the impossibility of all Christian propaganda in a world which was at the same time the Greek world. With an Aramaic gospel, Christianity would have remained a Galilean sect; to become a world religion it was imperative for it to speak the language of the world, and hence it comes that the Gospels assumed a cosmopolitan garb, that St. Paul and his fellows spoke and wrote the universal language, and that the New Testament became a *Greek* book.

The universal language was Greek, spoken at that period by more millions than Latin. It resulted from the great campaigns of Alexander the Great, coupled with the peaceful conquests achieved by the commerce, the art, and the learning of Greece, that at the great turning-point in the world's religion, at the beginning of our era, the ancient seats of civilization surrounding the Mediterranean basin — Southern Europe, Asia Minor, Egypt, and the rest of North Africa — were all more or less strongly Hellenized. The Greek language and Greek civilization were prevalent even in the lowest class of society, particularly in the cities. In Rome itself a countless multitude spoke Greek; we know, for example, that the large community of Jews in Rome spoke scarcely anything else.

It was not a local dialect of Greek that was spoken by the men of this Hellenized world. In earlier times various dialects were spoken in Greece, *e.g.* the Doric dialect, the Æolic, Ionic, and Attic dialects. But under the Empire the men abroad in the great world did not speak the old Doric, Æolic, Ionic, or Attic, but a universal Greek language, a common tongue that was understood everywhere. How this 'common' language (Κοινή) grew up is not altogether clear, and the question may be passed over by us; the great fact is certain, that at the birth of Christianity a universal language was in existence.

This language was not a homogeneous whole. Two strata are distinguishable in it, although the line of demarcation fluctuates. Of this universal Greek, as of every other living language, there were two concurrent forms, the one looser, the other stricter in usage. We may call these respectively the colloquial and the literary language. The colloquial language again shaded off into various fine distinctions, according as it was spoken by educated or uneducated persons. The literary language, of course, showed shades of difference also. At that time it was being influenced strongly in one direction owing to the enthusiasm for the great Attic writers of the previous age, whose style was imitated in the belief that it constituted for

all time the perfect model of 'good' Greek. This movement, the 'Atticist' movement as it is called, from its imitation of the Attic classics, was the fashion of the day in cultured and literary circles. We possess a number of works written under its influence, and are well acquainted with its linguistic theory. But we also possess examples of the colloquial language of the educated classes of the period, for several authors did not conform to the rules of the Atticists. Examples of the popular colloquial language, however, examples of the popular Greek of the period, were practically non-existent, at least for most scholars, if we go back some twenty years or more from the present date (1907); the whole of the great lower class under the Roman Empire — the non-literary, the weak and insignificant, the labouring class —a whole stratum of society, with its speech, seemed to have sunk for ever in the grave of oblivion, not for all, but certainly for most scholars.

This being so, what was the customary way of regarding the language of the Greek New Testament?

It may be said that although it was brought into close connexion with the universal Greek of the period, yet, on the whole, the tendency was towards philological isolation, and thus a special

linguistic species was created under the name of 'New Testament Greek.'

Two causes led to the triumph of the isolative method. On the religious or theological side the doctrine of the mechanical inspiration of the New Testament combined with a very plastic conception of the New Testament canon in forming a sharp boundary-line to isolate the New Testament. And on the linguistic side was felt the great contrast between the language of the Sacred Volume and the classical Attic which is taught in schools. Prejudiced in the belief that the Greek world came to an end with Alexander the Great—when, as a matter of fact, it is with him that it really begins—many readers of the Greek New Testament did not take the trouble to consult Greek texts of the post-Alexandrian and imperial periods, and thus for them the New Testament remained separated by a deep gulf from the only other phase of Greek with which they were acquainted. Philologists were in the same condemnation with the theologians: as late as 1894, Friedrich Blass,[1] the Professor of Greek at Halle, declared that New Testament Greek was 'to be recognized as something peculiar, obeying its own laws.'

That this isolative treatment of the language of

[1] *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 1894, xix. p. 338. Blass afterwards came to think differently on the subject.

the New Testament has ceased is owing to the papyri and other texts that form the subject of our inquiry. The numerous documents of the literary language, carefully disciplined as it was by artificial rules, have been supplemented by the slabs, papyri, and ostraca, which furnished documents of the colloquial, and particularly of the popular form of the language, as it had grown up in all its native wildness. The papyri and ostraca have afforded rich materials for comparison, principally as regards morphological phenomena, but the inscriptions have also yielded a good harvest, chiefly lexical.

The historical investigation of the language of the New Testament is still in its infancy, but we are already in a position to say that it has shown the New Testament to be, speaking generally, a specimen of the colloquial form of late Greek, and of the popular colloquial language in particular. The Epistle to the Hebrews alone belongs to another sphere: as in subject-matter it is more of a learned theological work, so in form it is more artistic than the other books of the New Testament. This result, like most advances in knowledge, is not an entirely new discovery. At the time when the ancient Greek culture was in conflict with Christianity, the assailants pointed sarcastically at the boatman's idiom of the New Testament, while the defenders, glorying in the

taunt, made this very homeliness their boast.[1] Latin apologists were the first to make the hopeless attempt to prove that the literary form of the Bible as a whole, and of the New Testament in particular, was artistically perfect[2]—a theory which many centuries later was again vehemently disputed in the quarrel between the Purists and the Hebraists. For our part, we are not of those who think that the wild rosebush is unlovely because it does not bear Marshal Niel roses. The unlovely does not begin till artificiality and sham have arisen. In our opinion, therefore, the new method in New Testament philology by proving the splendid simplicity and homeliness of New Testament Greek demonstrates the peculiar charm of the Sacred Book; we may apply to the popular language in its relation to the artificial literary language those words of the Master's: 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.'

Only by examples can the great importance of our texts in the linguistic study of the New Testament be properly shown. We refer to the ample lists in the works of Moulton and the present

[1] For details see Ed. Norden, *op. cit.* ii. 512 ff.
[2] Ed. Norden, ii. 526 ff.

writer, and content ourselves with giving a few characteristic examples which are not to be found either in the *Bible Studies* or in Moulton's essays, first a morphological, and then a few lexical and syntactical examples.

(*a*) Though it does not occur in the New Testament, the name *Panthera* is of great interest to the student, for it plays an important part in Jewish legends of the birth of Jesus Christ, and has recently become widely known through Häckel's notorious outpourings in *The Riddle of the Universe.* The name has engaged the attention of many scholars, nearly all of whom regard it as a nickname specially invented by Jewish controversialists, and to be referred either to πόρνος or to παρθένος. Now here it is chiefly the Latin inscriptions that enable us to solve this problem in onomatology with certainty. On numerous tombstones and in other inscriptions of the imperial age the name *Panthera,* which has also been found in Attic inscriptions, occurs as the cognomen of both men and women.[1] Probably the most interesting of all is the gravestone, dating from the very early Empire, of the Roman archer *Tiberius Julius Abdes* (= *Ebed*) *Pantera*, a native of Sidon in Phœnicia. The

[1] The complete evidence is given by the present author in *Orientalische Studien: Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet*, Giessen, 1906, pp. 871 ff.

stone was found near Bingerbrück, and is preserved in the museum at Kreuznach. The accompanying facsimile is an excellent reproduction.

(*b*) In the vocabulary of the New Testament many words used to be regarded as peculiar to the New Testament, and were therefore considered one of the most important characteristics of the isolated 'New Testament' Greek. But a large number of these words are found also, as the above-mentioned investigators have shown, in the inscriptions, papyri, ostraca, etc.; they belong, in fact, to the living language of that age. To mention one example,[1] we read in 1 P 5[3. 4]:

> . . . but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory.

By the 'chief Shepherd' is meant Jesus Christ, the Greek word, known hitherto only in this passage, is ἀρχιποίμην. Commentators are fond of seeing in this word a Christian invention; probably the word is also supposed to have had a specially official ring. It can, however, be shown that the apostle did not invent, but simply borrowed the word, and that, as might have been known, it expresses but a trifle more than the old familiar saying that Jesus is the 'Shepherd.' A wooden

[1] Cf. *Die Christliche Welt*, 1904, p. 77 ff.

tablet of the Roman period in Egypt, that was hung round the neck of a mummy as a means of identifying the deceased, bears the following (Greek) inscription:[1]—

Plenis the younger, the chief Shepherd's. Lived . . years.

The genitive, 'the chief Shepherd's,' on this tablet is no doubt simply a mistake in spelling—a mistake that is not without interest for us. The tablet can hardly have been carefully written for a man of rank, but must have been hastily done for a man of the people, the son of an Egyptian peasant, who was perhaps entrusted with the superintendence of three or even half a dozen shepherds. If Carl Wessely's reading[2] is correct, the same title occurs on another mummy tablet[3]:

Plenis
(Son) of Kametis,
Chief Shepherd.
40 years (old).

[1] Published by Edmond Le Blant in the *Revue Archéologique*, 1874, xxviii. p. 249; a facsimile of the tablet is appended to the volume, plate xxiii. fig. 14.

[2] *Mitteilungen aus der Sammlung der Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, v. p. 17, Wien, 1892. Wessely reads ἀρχιποίμ[ην].

[3] Also in Le Blant, p. 248; facsimile, plate xxi. fig. 9.

This Plenis would then perhaps be the father of the first. Judging from the facsimile, however, we are of opinion that the word does not occur on the second tablet. The first tablet is quite sufficient: 'Chief Shepherd' is a genuine popular title, not found in any learned work of antiquity, but only on the simple Egyptian tablet and, in the greatest popular work of the ancient world, the New Testament. The faith that named its Saviour 'the chief Shepherd,' placed no magnificent diadem of gold and precious stones on His head, but wreathed His brow with a simple chaplet of fresh green.

While many 'New Testament' words are thus secularized by our texts, much light is also shed on the meanings of words that were already known to belong to the common Greek language. Here, too, a single example[1] shall suffice. Jesus says to the apostles in Mt $10^{8ff.}$:

> 'Freely ye received, freely give. Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses (*margin*: girdles): no wallet for your journey . . .' (R.V.).

St. Mark 6^{8} says:

> 'And he charged them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff

[1] Cf. *Die Christliche Welt*, 1903, p. 242 ff.

> only; no bread, no wallet, no money (*margin:* brass) in their purse (*margin:* girdle)' (R.V.).

and St. Luke (9^3; cf. also 10^4 and $22^{35ff.}$):

> 'Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money . . .' (R.V.).

A characteristic saying of our Lord is here handed down to us with several variations, but the original shines clearly through them all: the apostles are to take with them on their journey only what is absolutely necessary,[1] and that includes neither money nor bread. According to St. Matthew they were forbidden not only to take money with them, but also to earn money on the road (by healing and other miracles). It has not often been asked what is meant by the 'wallet' (A.V. 'scrip'), because the answer has been assumed to be self-evident. Most of the commentators suggest a travelling-bag,[2] more particularly perhaps a bread-bag. The Greek word πήρα can mean either, according to the context. The travelling-bag certainly suits this

[1] The only questionable point about the tradition is whether the staff rightly belongs here.

[2] No doubt connecting the words 'wallet for your journey' closely together.

context well, the bread-bag not so well, because 'bread-bag' is superfluous after 'bread,' and one does not expect tautology in these brief, pithy commands of our Lord. But a special meaning made known to us by an ancient stone monument suits the passage at least as well as the general meaning of '(travelling-) bag.' A Greek inscription of the Roman period,[1] has been discovered at Kefr-Hauar in Syria, in which a 'slave' of the 'Syrian goddess' speaks of the begging expeditions he has undertaken for the 'Lady.' This heathen apostle—who speaks of himself as 'sent by the Lady'—tells with triumph how each of his journeys brought in seventy bags. Here he uses our word πήρα. It means, of course, not bags filled with provisions and taken on the journey, but a beggar's collecting-bag. This special meaning would suit the New Testament passages admirably, especially the context in St. Matthew: 'You are not to earn money, and you are also not to beg.' The divine humility of Jesus would stand out anew with this inscription as background were we to adopt this possible interpretation of the word πήρα. In the days of early Christianity the mendicant priest of the ancestral goddess wanders through the Syrian land; from village to village the string of sumpter

[1] Published in the *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*, 1897, p. 60.

animals lengthens, bearing his pious booty to the shrine, and the Lady will not be unmindful of her slave. In the same land, and in the same age, was One who had not where to lay His head, and He sent out His apostles with the words:

> 'Freely ye received, freely give. Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses: no wallet for your journey.'

(*c*) Syntactical problems often receive a new and better solution. Take, for example, a passage that has been a hard *crux* to the interpreters, Jn 1[14]:

> 'We beheld his glory, glory ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρὸς πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.'

Here the remarkable nominative πλήρης has received the most remarkable explanations. But the papyri[1] teach us that πλήρης in the time of the New Testament, and perhaps earlier, had become indeclinable, and the despised potsherds give us numerous examples of this use. The ostracon No. 1071 in Wilcken, dated 16th February 185 A.D., exhibits this shrunken form of πλήρης, and so probably does No. 1222, of the Roman period, both ostraca being from the Egyptian

[1] Cf. Blass, *Grammatik des Neutestamentlichen Griechisch* p. 81, Göttingen, 1896; and especially J. H. Moulton, *Grammar*, i. p. 50.

Thebes. A professed literary man would, of course, have avoided this shrunken πλήρης as a 'mistake'; the single πλήρης would suffice to give the Fourth Gospel the appearance of a popular work. If it was especially syntactical phenomena that caused many scholars to overestimate greatly the number of Semitic features (Hebraisms, Aramaicisms) in the New Testament, the memorials of the Greek popular language would materially reduce that number. A good example of this is the repetition of a cardinal number to express a distributive relation, which Blass, in the first edition of his grammar, still regarded as a Semitic feature. We can follow this usage (*e.g.* Mark 6^7) for two thousand years in the Greek colloquial language, and a papyrus of the third century A.D. is here the missing link between the New Testament and Modern Greek.[1]

The criticism of the style of the New Testament books is also put on a better footing by the other contemporary popular texts. Here, too, there is a prejudice to be overcome, the prejudice that texts which do not contain the long periods of classical Attic prose cannot be pure Greek; that the short, compact sentences of the Johannine writings, for instance, must at any rate be Semitic. But as certainly as the Semitic foundation is visible here

[1] Cf. *Encyclopædia Biblica*, iii. col. 3562.

and there through the Greek version of the original Aramaic in which our Lord's words were spoken, so certainly are the simple sentences of St. John, connected by 'and . . . and,' not un-Greek. They are in reality popular Greek; the same simplicity of sentence-construction is found in popular texts of the period. The Hebraisms in the New Testament are not frequent enough to change the whole character of the book; they are only birth-marks, showing us that this Greek Book for the people originated in the eternal East.

Leaving the Epistle to the Hebrews out of account, we must say, as the result of a comparison of the New Testament with the contemporary non-literary texts, that the New Testament is the people's book. When Luther, therefore, took the New Testament from the learned and gave it to the people, we can only regard him as restoring what was the people's own. And when at some tiny cottage window, behind the fuchsias and geraniums, we see an old dame bending over the open Testament, there the old Book has found a place to which by right of its nature it belongs. Or when a Red Cross sister finds a Japanese Testament in the knapsack of a wounded Japanese, here, too, the surroundings are appropriate. We venture, therefore, further to assert that the great Book of the People cannot properly be published

in *éditions de luxe*, with expensive engravings and rich binding. Moreover, it is not every artist who is able to illustrate the Book. Not to mention living artists, there have been two Old Masters equal to the task, and their names are Dürer and Rembrandt.

Time has transformed the Book of the People into the Book of Humanity. From the philological point of view it can be seen that the two ideas stand in causal relation. Because the New Testament came from the unexhausted forces below, and not from the feeble, resigned culture of a worn-out upper class—for this reason alone was it able to become the Book of Humanity.

Thus from the simple writings on stone, papyrus, and clay that unfold to us the nature of the language of the New Testament and at the same time reveal the peculiar characteristic of the Book, there streams a flood of light on the fate of the Sacred Volume in the history of the world: the New Testament became the Book of the Peoples because it was first the Book of the People.

III.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEXTS FOR THE LITERARY INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE foregoing estimate of the New Testament may be reached also from the point of view of the historian of literature, and again it is the texts of the imperial age that furnish the proper standard for criticizing the New Testament as literature.

The principle thus enunciated seems, however, to place us in an awkward situation. We have repeatedly insisted on the fact that the texts in question are largely of a *non*-literary character, and shall we now expect light on the state of literature from non-literary texts? That seems to involve a contradiction; and we admit that it may sound surprising at first when it is claimed that from such poor texts as papyrus and potsherd often afford, we can learn to estimate rightly the Epistles to the Romans and the Corinthians, and at length to comprehend the literary development of Primitive Christianity.

In speaking of the literary development of

Primitive Christianity we approach a subject which has not yet been recognized by many persons in its full importance. Huge as is the library of books that have been written on the origin of the New Testament and of its separate parts, the New Testament has not often been studied by historians of literature; that is to say, as a branch of the history of ancient literature. Indeed, the whole problem of the literary study of Primitive Christianity has been understood by very few scholars. An honourable exception must be mentioned, Franz Overbeck, with his important treatise on the beginnings of patristic literature.[1] As a rule, the very existence of the problem is not realized, because people approach the New Testament with the idea that the early Christian writings collected and preserved in this book are each and all of them literary works.

But the problem calls for consideration. Whoever looks on the New Testament simply as a collection of small literary works, and studies it as such, commits the mistake of which a writer on art would be guilty who should deal with a collection of curios in which natural petrifactions lay side by side with ancient sculptures, as if it were simply and solely a collection of works of art. It

[1] *Historische Zeitschrift*, 48; Neue Folge, 12 (1882), pp. 429 ff.

is wrong to *assume* that the New Testament is literary in all its parts; it is our duty to inquire whether it is so. This question coincides with another, somewhat differently formulated: Was Primitive Christianity literary from the beginning? or, When did Primitive Christianity become literary, and what are the separate stages in its literary development?

In order to answer these questions—questions not of academic interest merely, but conducive to an intimate knowledge of the essence of Christianity—we must have a clear idea as to the meaning of the term 'literature,' and the various forms in which literature may express itself. And here the inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca render us an inestimable service—first as non-literary texts, by teaching us that not everything which is written, or which has come down to us in written form, is to be regarded straightway as literature; and secondly, as popular texts, by teaching us that within the department of literature we must distinguish between what is literary and popular and what is literary and professional.

What is literature? We define it thus: Literature is that which is written for the public, or for a public, and which is cast in a definite artistic form. The man who writes a lease or a receipt, or an application to official quarters, or a letter, does

not in so doing contribute to literature. All the texts just named, lease, receipt, petition, letter, and scores of such, are non-literary texts, created not by art but by the necessities of life, destined not for the public and future generations but for the trivial round, the household purposes, so to say, of a man's life, or dedicated to the memory—alas, so brief—of one fallen asleep. This is precisely the charm which the thousands of such non-literary texts on stone, papyrus, and clay possess for us: that they are to a large extent documents of human life, not creations of art; that they are records of work and joy and sorrow, not intended for us, but placed in our hands by a kindly fate that wished to bring us of a later generation into human touch with the olden time. One class in particular of these documents of human life and work has been made accessible to us by the new discoveries in surprising abundance and delightful freshness—that is the ancient *letters*, the private, familiar correspondence of individuals, not in later copies, but the actual originals on stone, lead, papyrus, clay, and wax. What was impossible, say, in the decade before 1885 has now become a possibility: we can really write the history of ancient letter-writing, in its full extent of several thousand years, if we take it in the most comprehensive sense, and of more than one thousand years even if we limit it

to ancient letter-writing in Greek and Latin. The oldest Greek letter known, which was rescued by Professor Wünsch of Giessen, and has lately been the subject of a description[1] by Dr. Wilhelm of Athens, is written on a leaden tablet of the fourth century B.C. that was found near Athens, and is now in the Berlin Museum. After that date we have many hundreds of Greek autograph letters on papyrus and clay, written chiefly by unknown Egyptians from the third century B.C. down to the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.—a truly splendid collection of materials for the student of ancient letter-writing. Among them there are perfect gems of the most naïve humanity. These letters, accompanied by translations, ought to be made accessible to all educated people;[2] the continuity of the inner life of man throughout the centuries would be made plain to every discerning reader of these simple lines. Even supposing the letters were before us in a neat little volume, as clear as print could make them, yet no person of intelligence, despite the literary garb in which they had been arrayed after fifteen hundred years, would regard them as literature. Every one would know at once that these letters from soldiers, peasants, and

[1] *Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Instituts*, 1904, vii. pp. 94 ff.

[2] See the specimens given in the *Bible Studies*.

women were non-literary, that they were meant for the person to whom they are addressed, and that *we* possess them by the merest chance. The letter is a confidential conversation in writing. Individual and personal in its nature it is just as non-literary as an exercise-book, a lease, or a receipt. The public has nothing to do with it; it is and wishes to be private.

All this is very obvious, but it often happens that the obvious escapes people. One reason why the non-literary nature of the letter has not always been clearly understood is that even in antiquity there were authors who wrote literary matter in letter form. Long before the beginning of our era such literary letters were published, and down to the present day this unhampered, easy literary form has remained popular, especially in political literature, where, in the guise of the 'open letter,' it is fond of taking sides on questions of the hour. Theodor Mommsen repeatedly chose this form for his political manifestoes, and the letter of the Emperor William II. to Admiral Hollmann on the 'Babel-Bible' controversy was destined for publication from the beginning, and was not a familiar private letter, but a literary letter, an epistle. We will reserve this name 'epistle' for the literary as distinguished from the real letter. The epistle is a form of literary art, just like the drama, the

epigram, the dialogue, the oration. It has nothing in common with the letter but its form; in all else it is the opposite of a real letter. Its contents are intended to interest some sort of public. General in substance and in purpose, it makes use of what is individual only to keep up the appearance of a letter. The letter is private, but the epistle is cried in the market; every one may read it, many copies of it are published: the more readers it finds, the better its purpose is fulfilled.

The epistle is as different from the letter, as the historical drama is from history, as the epigram from an inscription on a vase, as a Platonic dialogue from the confidential talk of friends, as a funeral oration from the words of consolation spoken by a father to his motherless child—in short, as art differs from nature. The letter is a fragment of life, the epistle is a form and a creation of art.

What is the purpose of this distinction between the letter and the epistle to which we have been led by the ancient letters on stone, papyrus, clay, etc.? It is a matter of great importance for our subject. In the New Testament there are quite a number of longer or shorter texts which claim to be letters—'letters' of St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, etc. The question should surely at once suggest itself: Are these texts non-literary letters, or are

they literary epistles? Yet the fact that all these texts with the outward marks of letters have been collected in a book, the New Testament, has long blinded men to the existence of the problem. Most scholars, almost without troubling to examine them, concluded that all these texts were literary works. But now that the newly discovered letters have raised the whole problem and provided us with the standard by which an ancient text must be judged with regard to its epistolary character, the question can no longer be suppressed. In the judgment of the present writer there is but one answer possible as we rise from the study of those newly discovered letters, namely, a decided affirmation that the letters of St. Paul are not literary, that they are genuine familiar letters, not epistles, not written by St. Paul for publication and for after-ages, but simply for those to whom they were sent. Of course, even before the discovery of the ancient autograph letters there were scholars who recognized the letter-like character of the Pauline Epistles by internal evidence. But, on the whole, the study of St. Paul was dominated by the misconception that his writings were of the literary order. Now, however, in face of the wealth of materials for the history of ancient letter-writing, the conviction that St. Paul's writings are of the true letter-type will gain ground as time goes on.

We must only beware of discussing the question in its bearing on St. Paul to the Romans until we have first dealt with his smaller writings. They must be compared with the soldiers' letters and peasants' letters from Egypt, and with all the other ancient letters; the relationship of the two groups as regards phraseology and general style will then become apparent immediately. Even the oldest letter of all, written on the leaden tablet from Athens, is instructive. It contains an expression that, clearly current in the colloquial language, causes no surprise in a letter, and occurs again four hundred years later in St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.[1] When once the letter-like nature of the shorter Pauline Epistles has been recognized, that of the longer Epistles will be admitted without difficulty.[2] It is true, these letters were collected at an early date by the piety of the Churches, and after the death of St. Paul they rose to the dignity of literature, literature in the exalted sense of canonical literature. But that is purely an incident in the subsequent history of the letters which has analogies in many episodes of literary history, ancient and modern. This subsequent treatment can no more alter the original character of the letters than publication

[1] The stereotyped use of *τυχόν*, as in 1 Co 16^6.

[2] For what follows, cf. *Bible Studies*.

in a collected volume would affect the character of the papyrus letters from Egypt. St. Paul had no intention of increasing the existing number of Jewish Epistles by a few new writings, and still less did he think to enrich the sacred literature of his people: when he wrote he always had some perfectly concrete incentive in the often stormy life of the young Christian communities. He never dreamed of the destiny in store for his words in the history of the world, and had no idea that they would be in existence in the next generation, still less that they would one day become Holy Scripture to the nations. They have been handed down to us by the centuries with the patina of literature and the halo of canonicity upon them; we must imagine both of these removed if we wish to comprehend their real historical character. St. Paul had something far better to do than write books; he wrote only letters, genuine letters. His letters differ from the simple papyrus letters from Egypt not by being letters, but by being the letters of St. Paul.[1]

The letter-like nature of the short Epistle to Philemon will be the most readily admitted. It

[1] Cf. the suggestive appreciation of the Pauline Epistles by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in the work already quoted at page 28, *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, i. 8. pp. 157 ff.

would be a very dense and very uninspired criticism that should see in this jewel that a kindly chance has preserved for us a literary essay on 'The Attitude of Christianity to Slavery.' It is, in fact, a brief letter full of delightful, unconscious naïveté, full of kindly humanity.

Equally clear is the letter-like nature of the recommendation contained in the sixteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The fact that it is addressed to a plurality of persons, probably to the Church of Ephesus, will surely not be brought forward as an objection; a plurality of addressees cannot affect the classification of the letter.

The Epistle to the Philippians is, however, as letter-like a letter as ever was written; the apostle was compelled by a definite state of affairs to take up his pen, and what he wrote reflects, or at least suggests, a definite state of mind.

The same is true of the Epistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians, and also of the longer Pauline Epistles. They are indeed didactic in part, they even contain theological discussions, but here, again, the apostle had no intention of writing literature.

The Epistle to the Galatians is not a pamphlet on 'The Relation of Christianity to Judaism,' but a letter sent to correct the want of intelligence on the part of the Galatians. It is not intelligible

except in reference to the actual facts which occasioned the letter.

The Epistles to the Corinthians bear much more clearly the stamp of real letters. The Second Epistle, indeed, betrays its purpose in every line; it is, in our opinion, to be considered one of the most letter-like of all the Pauline Epistles, although it is not so obvious as in the case of the Epistle to Philemon. It is difficult for us to understand, because it it so thoroughly like a letter, so full of allusions and familiar references, so steeped in irony and in dejection, fighting against itself—things which the writer and his readers would understand as they were meant, but which we for the most part can only approximately explain. The didactic element is not an end in itself, but is purely subsidiary to the purpose of the letter as such. The Corinthians themselves quite understood the nature of the letters which were brought them by St. Paul's fellow-labourers, or they would scarcely have allowed one or two of them to get lost. They agreed with St. Paul in thinking the end of the letters was attained when once they had been read. We may regret most deeply that they took no pains to preserve the letters, but it would be absurd to reproach them for the omission. The letter is, and desires to be, something ephemeral; it is as little anxious for immortality as the con-

fidential conversation is anxious to be made the subject of a minute. Moreover, the spirit in which Paul and his converts spent their days was most unlikely to arouse in them an interest in the coming ages. The Lord was at hand; their outlook extended to His coming, and such hope as this knows nothing of the contemplative book-lover's joy of collecting.

The guileless religious temperament has never inclined to the things that interest the learned. Considered from the literary point of view, the fact that two Epistles to the Corinthians are actually preserved is the result of a later accident, owing, perhaps, to the comparatively great length of the letters, which saved them from immediate destruction.

The Epistle to the Romans is also really a letter. There are, indeed, parts in it which might equally well be in an Epistle; as regards its whole tone it is distinguished from the rest of the Pauline writings. But, nevertheless, it is not a book, and the favourite dictum, that it is a compendium of Pauline Christianity, and that the apostle here laid down his dogmatics and ethics, is, to say the least, liable to misconception. Of course, St. Paul wished to instruct, and he did so partly with the resources of contemporary theology, but he did not write for the literary public of his day, nor for

Christendom at large; his appeal is to a handful of men at Rome, of whose existence the public knew practically nothing. That the Epistle to the Romans is not so instinct with personal touches as St. Paul's other letters is explainable by the circumstances under which it was written. The apostle was writing to a congregation that was not yet known to him personally. Thus understood, the absence of the personal element does not speak for the epistolary and literary character of the Epistle to the Romans; it is rather the natural consequence of the non-literary circumstances that occasioned the letter. The didactic portions, moreover, were written by St. Paul with his heart's blood.

But why these long excursions on letter and epistle? Is not the distinction merely a dispute about words, one of those trifles over which a cloistered learning waxes warm? We think not. If St. Paul wrote epistles, then he was a literary man, and Christianity in him had already become literary; if St. Paul wrote letters, then he was not a literary man, and Christianity, therefore, had not yet become literary.

At the beginning of Christianity there certainly stands neither book nor letter, but spirit and personality. Jesus of Nazareth was altogether non-literary, and left not a line behind Him.

He relied entirely on the living word, splendidly confident that the scattered seed would one day spring up.

And beside Him there stands, equally non-literary, His great apostle. St. Paul, like his Master, did not make of Christianity what many people consider it to be—the religion of a Book. Like his Master, St. Paul, the non-literary Paul, embodies, in conscious opposition to the letter that killeth, the Spirit that maketh alive.

Thus, on the basis of inquiry into the history of literature, as it concerns the classical origins of Christianity, we can say: In its classical period, represented by Jesus and Paul, Christianity was not the religion of a book, not the religion of a law, but the religion of the Spirit.

Having realized this important fact, we can now take a hasty view of the subsequent course of development.

The time came when Christianity was to become literary, owing, doubtless, to a necessary historical evolution.

The first stage of Christian literature is inter-Christian, literature for Christians, and corresponding to the social structure of Primitive Christianity; it is, on the whole, popular literature. Here belong the Gospels (including the Gospel of St. John, which is far more popular than is generally allowed),

the Acts of the Apostles, and that most genuine people's book, the Revelation of St. John.[1] Even on stylistic grounds all these books are to be regarded as popular productions. The pagan texts do us the service of making clearer than before the nature of the popular language and of all that is denoted by the word 'popular.' But also as regards subject-matter, these Biblical writings are popular to the core. To this first popular stage belong also the Epistles of St. James, St. Peter, and St. Jude, and the didactic work that goes under the name of the First Epistle of St. John. We have here before us not genuine letters, but literary epistles, popular pamphlets addressed to the Christian public in the form of letters. Only the Second and Third Epistles of St. John are in the true sense short letters.

The second stage in the literary development of Christianity is the beginning of an artistic literature, with which the new religion rises out of its original stratum and aspires to culture,

[1] We place here a few words on the Apocalypse in a letter received from Carl Neumann, of Kiel, the biographer of Rembrandt: 'If you disregard the questions as to source, etc., and observe, as the commentator is no longer ingenuous enough to do, the effect of the whole, then I know no work of such powerful colouring in the contrasts, or you may say, of such wonderful instrumentation. There is something of barbaric freedom in it all.'

learning, and perhaps also power. One of the first evidences of this phase, and as such of unusual importance, is the Epistle to the Hebrews, a highly artistic theological book, polished in form and of carefully considered contents.

The third stage, falling within the second century A.D., is the beginning of a Christian world-literature: no longer literature solely for Christians, but books for the widest possible public, with a polemical and apologetic purpose. The so-called Apologists are representative of this phase.

The last stage, so far as essentials are concerned, about the middle of the second century, is the canonical literature: the formation of a new Christian canon beside the Old Testament, the consolidation of a 'new' Sacred Book, namely, the New Testament, into which the literary and non-literary inheritance from the great preceding epoch was gathered as a standard generally binding. And this is the point at which the evolution of Christianity to the religion of a Book sets in, its evolution to a Church with a legal status, the evolution of dogma and theology on the great scale.

If now, at the end of this third chapter, we were to be told that all this might have been known without any knowledge of the inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca, we should enter no indignant

protest. But we could certainly reply, that to us, at least, the outlines which we have sketched of the literary history of Christianity were first perceptible after a study of the said inscriptions, etc., had made clear to us the great difference between the literary and the non-literary, more particularly after the papyrus letters had taught us the nature of the ancient letter.

After that the full greatness of the literary history of early Christianity first dawned upon us. In the beginning there was not the written Book but the living Word, not the law but the Spirit, not the Gospels but the Gospel: in the beginning there was Jesus. And to this beginning, based as it is pre-eminently on the power of the Spirit, belongs also Paul, the Christian and apostle.

Then we see how simple, popular books arise for the unlearned humble members of the Christian brotherhoods, how the foundations of Christian literature are laid by the Evangelists and apostolic writers. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we see Christianity stretching its wings for the conquest of culture—the presage of a world-wide future for the new religion. We see the beginnings of the New Testament canon.

Throughout this literary development there is mirrored the great historic process which we are accustomed to call the history of Christianity.

We see clearly the growth of our religion from the Gospel up to the organized, constitutional Church. This growth is nothing but a huge process of cooling and congelation. The Reformation, brushing the centuries aside, appealed to the New Testament, and, in so doing, to an authority which, although in the form of a book edited by the Church, was yet, as regards the greater part of its contents, pre-literary—prior even to the Church itself. Thus the Reformation fused the cold, hard metal, and set it flowing once more, a glowing stream. By its use of the Book the Reformation saved Christianity from remaining permanently a religion of the book and the letter.

IV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEXTS FOR THE RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

In the days when the inscribed stone monuments of the ancient world were still above ground, and the dust and rubbish of Egypt were not yet piled up over the cast-out papyrus leaves, when people still wrote upon sherds, and the coins of the Roman emperors were current throughout the world—in those days a Man of Galilee, in conversation with His opponents at Jerusalem, took a Roman silver denarius in His hand, and, pointing to the portrait and inscription on the coin, spoke the words, 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.'[1] In an age in which divine homage was paid to the Cæsar, this sentence, without being disrespectful to the monarch, nevertheless clearly draws a sharp line of distinction between Cæsar and God. The two terms, Cæsar and God, are not of equal value

[1] Mt 22^{21} etc.

in this sentence, but the first is subordinated to the second: 'Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and, much more, of course, unto God the things that are God's'—that is the meaning of this pregnant text. The image and superscription on the coin are proof patent of the right of Cæsar to the tribute; the rights of God are not thereby impugned, for they tower high above the rights of this world. Thus the portrait and inscription on a Roman coin were used by Jesus as an object-lesson, in answer to a religious and political question of His age.

And not long afterwards, on the evening before His Passion, in the intimacy of converse with His nearest disciples, Jesus alluded to a custom that must have been known to Him from Syrian and Phœnician coins, and which can be proved by numerous inscriptions of the Greek world. The kings of the Gentiles, He says, are called 'Benefactors,' but it is not to be so with the disciples; he that is chief among them is to be as a servant.[1] Here, then, we are listening to the hypocritical phrase that displays itself on the coins and in the inscriptions of that age.[2] For a man to allow himself to be called 'benefactor' by another man seemed to the Master incompatible with the idea of brotherhood.

[1] Lk $22^{25ff.}$ [2] See chapter v.

Some twenty years later we see St. Paul, the world apostle of Primitive Christianity, on his way through the streets of Athens, pause and reflect before the inscription on an altar. The inscription interests him most intensely. *To an unknown god*,[1] he reads; and to him the stone speaks as the collective voice of heathen humanity seeking and sighing for the living God. And when, soon afterwards, he comes to Ephesus, here, after the episode of the inscription at Athens, he has a remarkable experience with papyrus books. By the power of the Spirit in his preaching a number of pagans were converted who hitherto had been addicted to magic, and now they brought their books of charms in great quantities and burnt them publicly, books to the value of 50,000 silver drachmæ, as we are told in the Acts.[2] They were, no doubt, exactly the same sort of magical texts as are now recovered in such numbers on Egyptian papyri of the imperial age.

The coin in the hand of Jesus, the inscribed stone at Athens before which St. Paul stood, the papyrus charms of the Ephesian magicians—does not the New Testament itself, in these typical cases, challenge us to regard the pagan texts of the imperial age with the eye of the student of religious history? Thus we raise the third question which

[1] Ac 17[23]. [2] Ac 19[19].

it was our intention to consider: the question of the importance of our texts for the interpretation of the New Testament as viewed by the historian of religion. Our first question was concerned with the philological importance of the texts, the second question with their literary importance. Both questions referred principally, though not exclusively, to the external or formal interpretation of the New Testament; in this chapter, however, the question touches most emphatically the inner or material interpretation of the New Testament, and therewith of Primitive Christianity. We believe that here also our texts will yield not unimportant results.

A mere glance at the fact that hundreds and thousands of the inscriptions and papyri are of religious content will interest us in the whole problem. There are the countless epitaphs in poetry and in prose, often stereotyped and impersonal, but not infrequently also of a simple sincerity of feeling; there are prayers and dedications, private letters with a religious colouring, and other records. The extent of what is discoverable from these texts, about the religion and cults of the age which saw the great change in religion, is shown by the monographs of the last twenty years. Even the non-specialist will have great profit in reading what Friedländer, for example, in his

pictures from the history of Roman morals, has collected out of the inscriptions concerning religious life under the Empire, with examples from the length and breadth of the Græco-Roman world; or what Carl Wessely[1] has collected from the papyri in his researches on the civilization of two Egyptian villages, and the religious life of those villages. To quote but one more recent work, which may in a double sense of the word be termed 'monumental,' there is Franz Cumont's book on the cult of Mithra; without the inscriptions this brilliant work could not have been written.

In these observations we have already indicated the *first* reason why the pagan texts are of such importance for the New Testament studied as part of the history of religion. They enable us to realize the religious environment of Primitive Christianity more clearly and comprehensively than was possible merely by the use of the literary sources.

Let us look for a moment at this environment.

The civilized world round the Mediterranean, in the age of the Roman Cæsars, lies stretching

[1] *Karanis und Soknopaiu Nesos, Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, philos.-hist. Klasse*, Bd. xlvii. pp. 56 ff., Wien, 1902.

out before us in the sunshine of the South. Lost in contemplation of the vision we hear the words, 'The field is the world,' and in the Eastern morning sun we behold a Sower moving along the furrows to sow His seed.

What did this field look like? Here, too, we have to correct the traditional lines of the picture. Most of us probably have learnt that it was a world of corruption into which the gospel came. The religious and moral condition of the Roman Empire has generally been painted in the gloomiest colours, and in places where they could not but find light, only too many of our authorities were disposed to call the virtues of the pagans brilliant vices. In our opinion this gloomy picture is owing to its being drawn, firstly, from the literary evidence of the age itself, and then from the polemical exaggerations of many old Fathers of the Church. It will be readily understood that, however intelligible as psychological phenomena, these exaggerations of polemic cannot be accepted as historical without criticism. It ought, however, to be equally clear that purely literary evidence is not sufficient to give us a reliable picture of any age. Literature, as a rule, reflects the feelings of the upper class, where the voices of doubt, negation, satiety, and frivolity are much louder than in the healthier, less *blasé* lower class. When the lower

class begins to doubt and deride, it has generally learnt to do so from the class above, and thus the lower is always a generation behind the upper class. It takes that amount of time for the impure matters to settle, but then they are purified again by a sort of automatic process. The forces of healthy reaction against decay lie in the healthy organism itself, or, as Carl Neumann once expressed it, in the well-spring of the deep-seated spiritual strength of the people. The literature of the Roman Empire abounds in expressions of resignation and negation; it witnesses to the luxury of the monarchs, with its refined cult of lust and cruelty; and hence it gives to a portion of the upper class—not to the whole of society in that age—the look that portends its fall.

If, however, we allow the non-literary evidence to influence us, that is, if we by this means allow the lower class to be heard, we shall be compelled radically to revise our judgment of the religious position under the Empire. The great mass of the people were deeply religious, and even in the upper classes there were plenty of pious souls. This has been proved irrefutably from the inscriptions by Friedländer in his sketches of the history of Roman morals. The papyri afford further proof. Any one who is not satisfied with this evidence might calculate the enormous sums of

money that were then voluntarily devoted both in the East and in the West to religious purposes, to temples, oracles, priests, and pious foundations. The great religious movements also bear witness to the strong hold that religion had upon the men of that generation. Gods migrated and became blended with the gods of other nations. Foreign cults came from the East and from the South and mixed with the old forms of worship; Isis, Sarapis, and, later, Attis and Mithra found everywhere their enthusiastic devotees. There was a dark side to all this, of course, just as in the upper classes of society there were the pleasing vistas already mentioned. But certainly, if we wish to be just—and the victors presumably can afford to be just to the vanquished—our general verdict as historians of religion must be framed like this: that the vast majority of mankind were not tired of religion, or hostile to religion, but friendly to religion, and hungering for it.

We may quote in confirmation of this another observer who long ago came to the same conclusion from the study of ancient inscriptions—we mean the Apostle Paul. After wandering through the streets of Athens, where so many inscriptions met his view, St. Paul summed up his impressions thus: 'Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are very religious!' Such were his

words on the Areopagus at Athens,[1] and so they must be translated; not, as the Authorised Version says, 'Ye are too superstitious.' They prove that St. Paul possessed a knowledge of the real spirit of his age, knowledge that he had acquired at first hand, by walking about with open eyes among the men and monuments of his time.

Considering, therefore, the strong hold which religion had on the age which saw the birth of Christianity, we are impelled to say that the age was prepared for the new religion, positively prepared for its reception.

We have already hinted that the lights are attended by shadows, and the second, somewhat less decided, impression which the period leaves on us is that it suffered from deep religious and moral evils. St. Paul, whose eye for facts may be trusted after Ac 17^{22}, has in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans drawn a night-picture of contemporary civilized life, particularly that of the great cities, which—to our shame be it spoken!—stands without parallel save in the cosmopolitan cities of modern Christendom. The religion of St. Paul's contemporaries is flecked with shadows equally dark. One point alone need be emphasized. In our reading of the epitaphs and other texts we find, on the one hand, a firm conviction of

[1] Ac 17^{22}.

immortality, and, on the other hand, expressions of a very different temper—the forced, hollow mirth which says, 'let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' and a helpless, weary, chilling despair. The Library of Yale University, U.S.A., possesses a Greek papyrus of the second century, from the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus,[1] on which is a letter of consolation, highly characteristic of this spirit of hopelessness:

> 'Eirene to Taonnophris and Philon, good cheer! I was as much grieved and shed as many tears over Eumoiros as I shed for Didymas, and I did everything that was fitting, and so did my whole family, Epaphrodeitos and Thermouthion and Philion and Apollonios and Plantas. But still there is nothing one can do in the face of such trouble. So I leave you to comfort yourselves. Good-bye. Athyr 1.'

Is not this letter an illustration of St. Paul's words about 'the rest which have no hope'?[2]

The helplessness of men before the great problem of personal life left them often enough at the mercy of the most degrading despotism.

[1] The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, No. 115.
[2] 1 Th 4^{13}.

Thousands had recourse to magic in order to extort by demonic aid what was otherwise denied them. The existence of vast numbers of magical books at Ephesus,[1] as proved by the incident already quoted in this chapter, is typical. Numerous papyri, leaden tablets, gold plates, and similar finds, have not only taught us the extent to which magic was disseminated; they have restored to us the magical texts themselves in large numbers. For many people magic must have been the beginning and the end of all their practical religion.

With reference, then, to the moral evils and the oft-heard cries of fear and helplessness, we can repeat the sentence already formulated: That the age was prepared for the new religion, *i.e.*, in this case, negatively prepared for its reception.

Both the positive and the negative aspects of this preparation can be comprehended in one expressive Greek word, which we again borrow from St. Paul. Under the Roman emperors the world was in its *Pleroma*. St. Paul uses this word in Gal 4^4, where the Authorized Version has 'when *the fulness* of the time was come.'[2] It

[1] Ac 19^{19}.

[2] 'So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage . . . : but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons' (Gal 4^{3-5}, R.V.).

expresses the fact that St. Paul regarded the period of Christ's advent as the date appointed by God for the dawn of a new epoch, namely, the coming of age of the human race. In our somewhat different figure the word *Pleroma* implies that the world was ripe for Christianity.

So much for the first or general background of Primitive Christianity, as indicated by the texts. We have, secondly, the ample contribution of the texts to the history of religious feelings, ideas, and institutions in detail. This division of our inquiry overlaps the earlier division which dealt with the philological bearing of the texts. We learn that many of the religious ideas employed by primitive Christianity were adopted from its surroundings, from the period; that, on the other hand, Primitive Christianity often gave to these venerable ideas a new import, or itself created new ideas. The same is true of the religious customs and institutions. The following are but a few of the religious conceptions, for the history of which we have gained important new material[1] from the inscriptions, papyri, etc., namely, 'God,' 'Lord,' 'the Most High,' 'The Son of God,' 'the Saviour,' 'the Creator,' 'prophet,' 'ministration,' 'priest,' 'bishop,' 'virtue,' 'manner of life,' 'debt,' 'propitiation,'

[1] Most of the references will be found in the author's *Bible Studies*.

etc. A few observations on one of these, the conception of 'Lord,' may here follow.[1]

It is a well-known fact that Augustus and Tiberius refused the title of 'Lord,' because it did violence to the Roman conception of the Empire as the 'Principate.' 'Lord' is a thoroughly Oriental conception; from time immemorial the kings of the East have been 'Lords' of the slaves, their subjects. The conception runs also through the Oriental religions, which are fond of expressing the relationship between the divinity and the devotee as that of the 'Lord' or 'Lady'[2] to a slave. This can be proved by innumerable examples, apart from the Old Testament. The effects of this mode of thought are traceable even in Greek religion, and in the cult of Sarapis. The men and women who wrote papyrus letters in Egypt under the Roman Empire, for example, often assure their correspondents of their prayers to 'the Lord Sarapis.' In the time of St. Paul, 'Lord' was throughout the whole Eastern world a universally understood religious conception. The apostle's confession of his Master as 'our Lord Jesus Christ,' with the complementary idea that Christians were dearly bought 'slaves' (the Author-

[1] Cf. *Die Christliche Welt*, 1900, cols. 291 ff.

[2] Cf., for example, the inscription from Kefr-Hauar, in Syria, quoted above, p. 43.

ized Version weakens the expression to 'servants'), was at once intelligible in all the fulness of its meaning to every one in the Greek Orient. 'Our Lord' as a divine title is felt to be thoroughly Eastern. Hitherto it has been generally assumed that the Roman emperors were first named 'Lord' and 'our Lord' from the time of Domitian onward. It may have been so at Rome, and in the West, but in the East, as we now know from the texts, men began much earlier to endow the emperors with the title which had been so long current in the courtly language of the country, and which from its associations carried with it an odour of sanctity. The later victory of 'Dominus' over 'Princeps,' which means the triumph of the political theory by which the Emperor was the Lord, and the overthrow of the other theory, by which he was only the Leading Member of the State—this victory, which ultimately betokens a victory of the East over Rome, was thus clearly foreshadowed centuries before. The present writer has collected a comparatively large amount of evidence on this point from papyri, inscriptions, and allied sources, from which it is clear that in Egypt and, for example, in Greece it must have been quite usual to call the Emperor Nero 'Lord.'[1]

[1] It is impossible, therefore, to make use of Act 25^{26} as a proof that the book in which it occurs is of late date.

The ominous title occurs occasionally, however, with the name of Claudius, and even with Tiberius, and, of course, the protests of Augustus and Tiberius, already mentioned, allow of the deduction that these emperors had at some time or other been entitled 'Lord.' It is therefore not impossible that Eastern Christians, hearing St. Paul preach in the manner of Ph 2^{11} and 1 Co 8^{6}, and other such passages, may have seen in the solemn acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the Lord, a tacit protest against other 'Lords,' or even against the 'Lord,' as the Roman emperor was beginning to be called. St. Paul himself may have felt and intended this tacit protest. More than this we would rather not assert at present. Later, no doubt, when the Dominatus had triumphed over the Principatus at Rome, there was, from the point of view of a Roman official, something extremely dangerous to the State in the formula, 'our Lord Jesus Christ.' And it can hardly be accidental that, as we again learn from the papyri and inscriptions, the Christian emperor, without abandoning the style of 'Lord,' yet chose another Greek word to express it. In papyri of the Christian period it is quite remarkable how κύριος gives way to the word δεσπότης in Greek imperial titles, as if it was desired to reserve κύριος for the Lord of Heaven.

That it needed no very special effort for St. Paul to think of the Roman emperor as 'the Lord' is shown by another fact which the newly discovered texts have established. In describing the Eucharist as '*the Lord's Supper*,'[1] St. Paul employs the adjective κυριακός, and many scholars, finding no other examples of its use, have assumed that the word was invented by St. Paul for the occasion. It is proved, however, by the inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca, that it was used in the official language of the Greek East (Egypt and Asia) to mean 'pertaining to the Lord, *i.e.* the Emperor,' 'imperial.' The earliest example of the pagan use of the word with which we are acquainted occurs in an inscription of the Prefect of Egypt, Tiberius Julius Alexander, found in the great Oasis. It belongs to the year 68 A.D., and is therefore of St. Paul's date. The prefect, of course, did not learn the word from the First Epistle to the Corinthians, but from the current language of his time, of which St. Paul also made use. We have here a clear case of a word current in the official political phraseology of the East being taken over into the religious vocabulary of Primitive Christianity, in the first instance by St. Paul.

The history of the term 'Lord' furnishes other

[1] 1 Co 11[20]

analogies of some interest. Two short letters of invitation, of the second century A.D., were found at Oxyrhynchus, one of which is now in the Library of Eton College, Windsor,[1] and runs thus:

> 'Chairemon invites you to dine at the table of the Lord Sarapis in the Sarapeion to-morrow, the 15th, at 9 o'clock.'

The other,[2] now in an American Library, runs:

> 'Antonios, son of Ptolemaios, invites you to dine with him at the table of the Lord Sarapis in the house of Claudius Sarapion on the 16th, at 9 o'clock.'

The remarkable expression, 'the table[3] of the Lord Sarapis,' is a striking parallel to St. Paul's phrase, 'the Lord's table.' We regard St. Paul's phrase as parallel rather than derived, because in all probability it was influenced by the Greek Old Testament (cf. Mal $1^{7.12}$, Ezk 39^{20}, 44^{16} in the Septuagint), just as the phrase, 'the table of devils' in 1 Co 10^{21} points to the Septuagint version of Is 65^{11}. On the other hand, we would not assume that the Sarapis formula is derived from the

[1] The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, No. 110.

[2] The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, No. 523.

[3] The Greek word in both papyri is κλίνη. In 1 Co 10^{21}, 'the Lord's table' (A.V.), 'the table of the Lord' (R.V.), the word is τράπεζα. For what follows, cf. *Die Christliche Welt*,' 1904, cols. 37 ff.

Pauline, although the idea is not an impossible one. For the present it can only be said that the two phrases crop up, as it were, side by side, without any apparent genealogical connexion. The lesson of the Egyptian parallel is that again in an important particular the pagan phraseology approximates to the technical phraseology of early Christianity. In order to make plain to his Corinthians the nature of the Christian Eucharist, St. Paul did not scruple to employ the analogy of the pagan sacred feasts.[1] In the gospel preached by a missionary like St. Paul there was so very much that sounded familiar to the 'Greek,' that the one new thing, the message of Jesus Christ, produced all the greater impression.

One further example may be mentioned, belonging to that popular sphere which has been so often brought into prominence in these pages. It concerns an expression[2] which occurs in the account given by St. Mark (7^{35}) of the healing of the deaf and dumb man:

> 'And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.'

Most commentators explain the phrase, 'string of his tongue' (R.V. 'the bond of his tongue')

[1] 1 Co 10^{19-21}.

[2] Cf. *Die Christliche Welt*, 1903, cols. 554 ff.

as figurative: 'the tongue with which it is not possible to speak is looked upon as bound.' This view is taken, for instance, by Bernhard Weiss in Meyer's *Handbuch*, with the result that, though the whole sentence is not made unintelligible, the point of the phrase in question is probably missed. We believe that the first readers of the Gospels and the evangelist himself understood the phrase in a definite technical sense. The idea runs through the whole of antiquity that a man can be 'bound' or 'fettered' by demonic influence. We find this idea in Greek, Syrian, Hebrew, Mandæan, and Indian charms.[1] From the Greek-speaking peoples of antiquity there has even come down to us a document[2] of precise instructions how to 'bind' a man by art magic, and we possess quite a number of ancient inscriptions with the 'binding' of a man as their subject.

'I bind Euandros in leaden bonds' is the reading on a leaden tablet of the third century B.C., from Patissia,[3] and similar inscriptions occur on over fifty leaden cursing-tablets of the same period from Attica.[4]

[1] Cf. M. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, vol. i. p. 31.

[2] In the Anastasy magical papyrus. The passage referred to has been edited by R. Wünsch in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum*, Appendix, p. xxx.

[3] *Ibid.* No. 45. [4] *Ibid.* Nos. 40 ff.

That the idea flourished not only at this time and place, but in other nations and periods of antiquity, is shown by a lead tablet of the imperial period from Carthage,[1] which calls upon gods and demons in these terms:

> 'I adjure you by the great Name, that ye bind every limb and every sinew of Biktorikos.'

The *tongue* of a man is often particularized. Among the Attic tablets of lead mentioned above there are thirty on which the tongue of an enemy is 'bound' or cursed.

'I bind the tongue and soul (of the enemy)' is the inscription on two Attic tablets of the fourth century B.C.[2] A cursing-tablet of the second century B.C., from Tanagra,[3] adjures Hermes and Persephone

> 'to bind the tongue of Dionysia.'

A Mandæan enchanting-dish of much later date in the Louvre at Paris bears the inscriptions[4]:

[1] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, viii. Suppl. No. 12,511.

[2] *Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum*, Appendix, Nos. 49 and 50.

[3] *Ibid.* p. viii.

[4] *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, vol. i. pp. 100 ff. The exact date of the dish cannot be determined.

> 'Bound and stopped be the mouth, and stopped the tongue of curses, of vows, and of imprecations of the gods. . . . Bound be the tongue in its mouth, stopped be its lips, shaken, fettered, and banned be the teeth, and shut be the ears of curses and of imprecations.'

What was understood and intended by 'binding' the tongue is made clear by synonymous expressions.

'Cripple the senses, the tongue (of Kallias)' is the exhortation of an Attic leaden tablet[1] of the third century B.C. to Hermes Katochos.

'They will strike dumb my adversaries' is another expression of the same idea on a leaden tablet[2] of the third century from Kurion, near Paphos, in the island of Cyprus, where St. Paul encountered Elymas the sorcerer. He, therefore, whose tongue was 'bound' was expected to become dumb in consequence; and we may say inversely that he who was dumb was often regarded in popular belief as demoniacally 'bound.' This latter idea falls into line with the more general and very widely spread belief that certain diseases

[1] *Corpus Inscriptionum Atticarum*, Appendix, No. 88. The verb for 'cripple' is *κατέχω*.

[2] *Ibid.* p. xviii. The verb used here is *φιμόω*, which the lexicographer Hesychius explains as synonymous with 'bind.'

and diseased conditions were caused by demonic possession. Thus, in Lk 13^{16}, our Lord Himself says that Satan had 'bound' a daughter of Abraham eighteen years. The reference is to the deformed woman mentioned in v.[11], 'who had a spirit of infirmity,' and whose 'bond' Jesus had 'loosed' on the Sabbath day (v.[16]). The 'bond of the tongue' in St. Mark may, therefore, well be a technical expression of this kind. The evangelist wishes to relate not only that a dumb man was made to speak, but that a demonic chain was broken, and that one of the works of Satan was destroyed. It is again one of those popular features which facilitated the entry of Christianity into the ancient world.

We have given only a few examples. Were it possible for a scholar at the present day to survey the whole vast mass of details afforded by the texts on stone, papyrus, etc., he would be convinced that the threads connecting Primitive Christianity with the life of the time are legion—in other words, that Christianity, though it introduced a new epoch, had a foundation in history.

Of still greater importance, in our judgment, than the promotion of our knowledge of all these details, is a third service rendered to the New Testament by the witnesses to the religious life of the Roman Empire. They make the student's eye

keen to recognize the essence of religion, particularly of popular religion, religion as distinguished from theology. Previous generations of commentators have generally regarded the New Testament retrospectively. From their own theological and ecclesiastical sphere they looked back at the primitive age of Christianity, and submitted it to an essentially theological and ecclesiastical judgment, using the book of that age, the New Testament, according to their conception of it as a great Book of law and dogma. If, however, we approach the New Testament from the point of view of its own times, from the point of view of its own religious environment, as that has been made actual to us by the inscriptions, etc., scales, as it were, fall from our eyes. With the self-same eyes which, owing to modern dogmatic prejudice, formerly suffered from religious blindness, we then see that the New Testament owes its existence in large measure to religion rather than to theology. Just as the texts sharpened our perception of the real meaning of what was non-literary, so, too, they reveal to us the significance of what is non-theological and pre-dogmatic. This is laying strong stress on the fundamental distinction between religion and theology—what, then, is that distinction?

Religion is, no matter in what form, a relation

between ourselves and a superhuman divine power. Theology is the science of religion; it examines the phenomena of religious life in the history of mankind. Besides this great historical function, it discharges also speculative and normative functions, but it is the science of religion, not religion itself. Religion and theology are related to each other in the same way as art and æsthetics, as language and philology, as the starry sky and astronomy. Theology is therefore of the secondary, religion of the primary, order of things. Theology is scientific reflexion concerning one aspect of the life of the individual; religion is personal life itself.

Now, by far the greatest part of the religious records of the Roman Empire are in the true sense records of religion. It is not always a simple living religion—not unfrequently it is formal and stereotyped—but it is religion, often the religion of the people, and hardly ever the theology of a thinker, that is represented in the existing remains. No serious student would dream of regarding the many scattered memorials of pagan piety as a series of theological manifestations — the testimonies to the religion of the Roman army,[1] for instance, as subjects for an essay on 'The Theology of the Roman Army.' And when, from a

[1] As collected by the author's friend, Alfred von Domaszewski.

study of the memorials of a strong and simple piety, one has acquired an eye for the childlike, unquestioning, and non-theological characteristics of true piety, it becomes impossible to understand how the New Testament can be read otherwise than with the same sympathy for the childlike, the unquestioning, and the non-theological, which stands out in almost every line of this book of the people of a former, more pious age.

Let us put the matter to the test. In the forefront stands Jesus of Nazareth, and if anything can with certainty be affirmed of Him it is this: that He was no brooding theologian. He is completely non-theological. He is all religion, all life; He is spirit and fire. To speak of the theology of Jesus is a mere form of words. He had no theology, for He had the living God in Him. The fact was shown by His testimonies, words of conflict and of exhortation. He who undertakes to formulate a theology of Jesus from our Lord's testimonies behaves exactly like the infant who stretches out his arms to grasp the golden sun. Let us have done with the theology of Jesus; it leads a shadowy existence in books, but in the light of day it never was.

And how is it with St. Paul? St. Paul certainly possessed, even when he was a pupil of Rabban Gamaliel, a decided theological bent. But it is

highly questionable whether we have grasped St. Paul's chief characteristic if we call him the great theologian of Primitive Christianity. Our own answer would be, 'Not at all!' With St. Paul, as with every right theologian, the primary consideration is religion, and this is so not only with St. Paul in the course of his psychological development, but with St. Paul the finished man. St. Paul is the prophet and the missionary of Primitive Christianity. It is possible to speak of the theology of St. Paul, but we are unjust if we do not first speak of his religion, which glows and throbs beneath the surface even of the more theological parts of his Epistles. We decline, therefore, to discover only 'Paulinism' in St. Paul; we refuse to turn the man into a bloodless system. In history the religion of St. Paul has had far more effect than his theology, and the same is true of Primitive Christianity as a whole. It was certainly not long before Primitive Christianity struck into theological paths, as proved by the classical example of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the evolution of ecclesiastical Christianity is the evolution not only of a constitutional body, but also of theological Christianity. The mighty influence, however, exercised by Christianity in its early days was the result of religion, the force which propagated itself by contact, the life transmitted from man to man and from conscience to

conscience. And subsequently the epochs of Christianity which have affected history have been the religious epochs. Where theology has pushed itself forward it has bound the pinions of the life in God and tied the hands of brotherhood and of the zeal which overcomes the world. In the study of Primitive Christianity the exclusively theological way of looking at things has presented us with dogmatists instead of prophets, and turned the confessions of struggling men and pardoned sinners into moral sentences. Totally unable to appreciate the signs of healthy life and sturdy independence, this same theologizing tendency has misinterpreted the non-literary letters of the apostolic missionaries as works of literature, and exalted their popular dialect into a sacred idiom. But when we approach the New Testament from the same point of view as men of the imperial age, all the prejudices which obscure the historic vision are removed. We hear the unpolished tones of the popular dialect, we see non-literary texts and popular books, we see a religion strong in the strength of the people, Primitive Christianity to wit, coming forward to gain adherents in the age of the 'fulfilment.'

Let us now attempt to view this propagandist religion in its characteristic peculiarity as it must have appeared to the pagan of the Western world.

We are accustomed, as a rule, to take up a position within the sphere of Primitive Christianity and to look from East to West, from Galilee and Jerusalem towards Ephesus and Rome. But we shall not acquit ourselves of our historical task unless we take our stand in the West and view with the eyes of a contemporary the great tidal-wave of a new religion slowly rising on the Western world from out the Eastern sea of nations, from the birthplace of the world's great religions.

In viewing the westward advance of Christianity we can, of course, only take in what is most characteristic. Microscopic observation is out of the question; we must stand back in order to see; then, and only then, the historical character of early Christian religion will appear. Therefore, instead of attempting ten or twelve or fifty horizontal sections of early Christianity, we conceive of it as a single whole, and make one vertical section through that. Then it matters not if there were a number of different personal types of early Christianity; the men of the time were not affected by the individual variations, but by the style and spirit of the whole.

The first thing which strikes us at the present day in the religion of the Primitive Christians, even in the very first pages of the New Testament, is the miracles. A contemporary, however, would take

them as a matter of course, finding in them nothing exclusively Christian. For him there was no such thing as a religion without miracles. The most remarkable feature in Christianity was for him what we, alas, at the present day too often take for granted as something commonplace and trivial, namely, *the One Living God.* We are careful not to say, 'Monotheism'; that is the doctrine or the system of the One God. But the One God Himself, who is both Life and Spirit, and who drew near to the pagan in the preaching of the missionaries, now taking the wings of the morning, and now flying upon the storm-wind,—He it was who promised to satisfy the hungry. The world had long been prepared for this One; the Greek thinkers, Plato especially, had made straight His way, and Greek Judaism with the Septuagint had ploughed the furrows for the gospel seed in the Western world.[1] And now came He whom the wise men had foreseen and the Jews worshipped; and the pagan, anxious and distracted by the complexity of idolatry, at last heard of a God who is near us, with whom we can have communion, and in whom we live, and move, and have our being. The result was inevitable. The crowd of lesser lights in the night sky paled before the one majestic luminary

[1] Cf. Deissmann, *Die Hellenisierung des semitischen Monotheismus*, Leipzig, 1903.

of day: *ex oriente lux!* In this light from the East men understood what their poets had prophesied: 'We are also His offspring.'

And secondly, *the figure of Jesus Christ.* Whenever the apostles preached, they preached Jesus Christ, and it was clear to every hearer that these missionaries were introducing the cult of Jesus Christ. It was not the cult of a dead man, but of a living Person, the cult of a Lord who was above all lords. Such cults had already been preached by other apostles, but no other ancient cult ever impressed men as did the cult of Jesus Christ; all the cults of the old gods and goddesses were obliged either to give way before it or to take refuge under Christian names in the holes and corners of Christian superstition.

Wherein lay the superiority of the cult of Jesus Christ? In the gospel tradition of Jesus which lay behind the cult. Jesus was not merely a sacred name, the unknown mysteries of which filled men with vague misgivings, but He was a personality in history, richly endowed with very definite characteristics, and present to men's minds in very definite portraits, thanks to the tradition enshrined in the Gospels. What immense significance attached, for example, to the picture which St. Paul was so fond of presenting to the Gentiles—the picture of Christ crucified. And furthermore, the truly grand sim-

plicity of Jesus, which is revealed on the mere linguistic examination of His words, helped to commend Him in the highest degree to the people. Women and children, soldiers and slaves hailed Him with joy, and at the same time philosophers might make ready to plunge into the depths of His personality.

Nevertheless there is great variety in the early Christian appreciation of Jesus. There is no stereotyped formula, no exclusive dogma, no uniform Christology. Thousands of witnesses confess Christ in as many voices, and yet they are voices singing in harmony the nations' hymn of praise. Some acknowledge Him as the Shepherd, the Way, the Guide, the King, the High Priest, the Saviour, the Lord; others confess the Lamb of God, the Prophet, the Brother, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Son of David, the author and perfecter of our faith. One or other of these full chords of praise would appeal to practically everybody who was at all attracted by Jesus.

The great chorus of witness to Christ culminates in the prayer, 'Come, Lord Jesus!' Over the apostolic age there hangs like a storm-cloud the expectation of Christ's speedy coming with power to judge the world. Thus we reach the third characteristic feature of Primitive Christianity—*its hope of eternity.* Hopes of Christ's Second

Advent may have cooled as time went on, but Christianity remained a religion of eternity. Men heard tell of the heaven opened and of the resurrection of the dead, and this message concerning eternity satisfied all their needs, whereas the resignation bred of despair and doubt had had absolutely nothing to offer. Even pagans, who already as pagans had attained a hope of immortality, now found a new happiness beyond their old faith.

The Christian message concerning eternity sounded forth as a trumpet, not only proclaiming peace to all the weary and heavy-laden, but also calling to judgment. The missionaries impressed on the pagans the fact that the world would be judged. This brings us to the fourth distinguishing feature of Primitive Christianity. Outsiders must have been struck by *the moral earnestness of Christianity*. Personal responsibility, the necessity of conversion, the awfulness of sin, and the pangs of conscious guilt—how real and indispensable these all are! The ideas were not altogether new; much had been anticipated and prepared for by earnest thinkers. But for this very reason the message fell on the ancient world like fine wheat on freshly ploughed fallow. The close interlocking of religion with morality, which from the beginning was one of the essentials of Christianity, and which has been perpetuated in

the Christian conception of God, was intelligible even to the simplest when love of one's neighbour was demanded as part of the love of God. The lower classes at that time, as the inscriptions have lately shown us, were permeated by a strong feeling of solidarity which led to the formation of innumerable associations of artisans, slaves, etc. And now arose the religious association, the brotherhoods of the first Christians, in which the fraternal principle took shape, and where the slave sat beside his master, the wife beside her husband, and the Scythian beside the Greek and the Jew, because all were one body in Christ. There was St. Paul, with the countenance of a man dwelling upon the eternal, and yet with both feet firmly planted on the earth, organizing, building, collecting pence for the poor brethren abroad. A character such as this affected men profoundly, and it was in no small measure the social expression of Christian thought which contained the promise of victory over all the cults. They ravished the soul, perhaps, in the tremor of ecstasy, but forgot what St. Paul called the 'more excellent way.'[1]

We believe that the religion of the Primitive Christians, regarded from the point of view of contemporaries, presents four characteristics worthy of mention — God, Jesus Christ, Eternity, and

[1] 1 Co 12^{31}.

Love. These stand out against the background of the ancient world, and, as we look at them once more, surely there can be but one conclusion. Is not the impression left by this scrutiny of the evidence for the history of religion the same as we received from our philological and literary inquiries —a conviction of the splendid simplicity of Christianity? And does there not lie in this simplicity, which is not indigence but innate strength concealed, the secret of its future conquest of the world?

V.

RECAPITULATION—PROBLEMS FOR FUTURE INVESTIGATION.

When European savants copy inscriptions in the Libyan oases in the south-west of Egypt, the natives believe that the white strangers acquire through the inscriptions power over vast hidden treasures described therein. The ancient inscriptions and allied texts have been our subject in the foregoing pages, and we may ask, in conclusion, whether scholars have succeeded in recovering the precious treasures whose presence was betrayed by these old texts. If the question were asked of archæologists and historians alone, there is no doubt it would be answered by many in the affirmative. The general science of classical antiquities owes an enormous debt to these texts. Brilliant proof of this assertion is afforded by the single name of Theodor Mommsen. The whole life-work of this eminent scholar was rendered possible solely by the ancient inscriptions. If then the

question about the recovery of the treasures were addressed to the student of early Christianity, he could answer, in the first place, that every real advance in our historical knowledge of antiquity must indirectly benefit the historical interpretation of Christianity. But we believe it is possible to go further, and to speak of a threefold direct value possessed by the ancient texts in the study of the New Testament and, consequently, Primitive Christianity.

In the first place, the inscriptions, papyri, ostraca, etc., have taught us to judge rightly of the language of the New Testament. Roughly speaking, the New Testament is written in the non-literary colloquial language, more particularly in the non-literary language of the people.

Secondly, the texts have assisted us in the literary criticism of the New Testament by heightening our appreciation of writings of a non-literary and pre-literary character, and by teaching us to distinguish between popular and artistic varieties of literary work. Thus we have been enabled to recognize a large part of the New Testament as non-literary, another large part as popular literature, and a minute fraction as artistic literature.

Thirdly and lastly, a study of the texts of the Roman Empire has yielded results bearing on the

position of the New Testament and Primitive Christianity in the history of religion. They have taught us to reconstruct with fairness and greater accuracy the popular religious environment in which the great religious transformation took place. They have sharpened our vision for innumerable details which Primitive Christianity took over and further developed from its surroundings in the East and in the West. But chiefly we have been taught to regard Primitive Christianity not with dogmatic, theological eyes, but with sympathy for simple religion, especially for the vigorous religion of the masses. Thus we have learnt to recognize that the character of Jesus is wholly, that of St. Paul principally, untheological and pre-dogmatic, and generally to recognize the lofty simplicity of Primitive Christianity.

This threefold study of the New Testament based on the authentic evidence afforded by antiquity has been associated with a method of inquiry which, instead of isolating the New Testament and Primitive Christianity, seeks to put them back into the place, and time, and particularly into the social class in which they originated. If the New Testament learning of former centuries has generally been too dogmatic and aristocratic, it must in our century become

historical and democratic in avowed opposition thereto. The democratic point of view is of the greatest importance and value, not only for the early history, but for the understanding of the whole two thousand years' evolution of the world-religion. Even after it had found its way from the workshops and cottages into the palaces and schools, Christianity did not shun the workshops and cottages, but remained with its roots fixed in the lower social stratum. Whenever in the revolution of the historical kalendar autumn had stripped the leaves off the tree-tops and the winter storm had torn off the branches, the sap rising upwards from below always awoke the sleeping buds, promising blossoms and rich harvest days. At the beginning there stand Jesus the carpenter, and Paul the tentmaker, and so at the most important turning-point in the later history of Christianity there stands another *homo novus*, Luther, the miner's son, the grandson of a peasant. The whole varied history of Christianity has been far too often regarded as a history of the Christian upper class, as a history of the theologians and churchmen, the schools, councils, and parties, though the really *living* Christianity was often to seek in quite another place than in the councils or in dogmatic lecture-notebooks and folios. Tischhauser, the lecturer to the Bâle Mission, has

done good service by writing a German ecclesiastical history of the nineteenth century, in which attention is paid to those undercurrents which are generally ignored because they leave no literary memorials, or because the modest literature which they produce is ousted by the collected works of academic Christianity and Church politicians into the darkest recesses of the *bibliotheca christiana*. As regards the historical estimate of the earliest stage of Christianity, there can be no doubt that every study which is conducted mainly on aristocratic lines will distort the real picture. On the other hand, a mainly democratic method of study yields an abundance of important facts, and not unfrequently new points of view; and here there are still great problems awaiting solution.

'Problems'—that is the subject of which we have yet to speak. To speak on this subject—the present writer knows not whether to call it easy or difficult. He is tempted to call it easy, because he is confident that he sees a number of problems clearly defined, because he is persuaded of the necessity of their solution, and because he ventures to see in all these problems a portion of his own lifework. On the other hand, he must call the problems difficult, and find it difficult to speak of them, because it means speaking of what

is unfinished—of dozens of opened books piled one upon another, hundreds of scribbled slips and sheets of paper, library steps to be climbed, dust to be encountered, dull cloudy days and lamplight, excitement and disappointment, and the miserable bargains that the researcher is forced to make, parting with a single solved problem, and receiving in exchange for it ten unsolved. Our subject is, above all, difficult, because the worker knows that his aim is great, that his accomplishment will share the imperfection of all human work, and that by speaking prematurely of this great aim he will rouse expectations that he is unable to fulfil.

But that is after all the fate, we say the blessed fate, of all true research work: in this respect more nearly related to the work of the artist, it has to temper its strength by striving after an ideal which, being an ideal, is unattainable, but which for that reason floats before our eyes as the goal which must be attained.

The first problem is concerned with the texts themselves. Texts must be collected and carefully edited. More particularly in excavating for papyri in Egypt much yet remains to be done, and the collection and preservation of the despised ostraca are only just beginning. In the publication of papyri it is urgently desirable that even non-literary

fragments of apparently insignificant contents should be printed verbatim, especially in the interests of historical philology. It is illogical and unjust to publish almost every tile-stamp of the Roman legions in full, and long papyrus documents of the same period often only in excerpts. Of the inscriptions on stone, metal, etc., we have already said that new editions of the old collections are now in progress. We may here add that the acquisition of new texts, especially excavating for papyri and ostraca, is largely a question of finance, but that even now with comparatively slender means much may be done if a skilful beginning is made. We have special cause to be grateful that recently, even in Germany, the means for such excavations have been provided by wealthy persons of scholarly tastes, thus following the gratifying example long set by England and America.

The second problem for research concerns the competent working-up of the texts in the interests of philology, literary and religious history. It is highly gratifying to note with what zeal the philological work has been taken up. In view of the numerous works on the history of the Greek language in the period between Alexander the Great and the Byzantines, we must fairly speak of a renaissance of Greek philology. Next, the literary study of the ancient world will be promoted

by working out more precisely the distinction between what is literary and what is non-literary on the basis of the new texts. One great task especially lies before us here: the history of ancient letter-writing must be written,—and that is now possible. Immeasurably great are the single problems in religious history. Works of the type of Cumont's brilliant monograph on the cult of Mithra, already mentioned, are needed on many other cults of the Empire, and here also many distinguished scholars are at work. At the end of these studies—the word 'end,' of course, means here only a new beginning—at the end of these studies there will come a Master, the Mommsen of ancient religious history, who, being at once an exact scholar and an inspired artist, will create a complete picture of the religion and religions of the imperial age, confirming beyond all expectation that verdict of St. Paul's religious and historical insight which the apostle of the Gentiles summed up in the expression *Pleroma*, the time of fulfilment.

These problems will for the most part be solved outside the range of specially theological literature, although the old boundaries between our learned crafts have, by no means to the disadvantage of research, been broken down at many points, and are destined to disappear yet more. But the

theological faculties will also receive work in plenty. Briefly the problems before us can be thus formulated: Aided by the self-recorded evidence of antiquity, including, of course, that of ancient Judaism and the Semitic religions of which we have not had to speak here, we have to win a point of vantage from which to study the New Testament scientifically; the exclusively retrospective method, in which the predominating dogmatic and ecclesiastical interests have only too often made us blind to religion, is to be replaced by the historical investigation of religion. In this last phrase 'religion' is to be emphasized as strongly as the 'historical.' It cannot be otherwise, since the study of ancient religious texts, which are certainly not dogmatic, is bound to restore to us more and more that feeling for the religion in the New Testament which we had almost entirely lost. A whole mass of discussions, unintelligible apart from the inner mysteries of the higher dogmatics of after-generations, and connected with the New Testament only by an artificial bond, will cease to be. A later age, grown powerful indeed, but at the price of spiritual beggary, was dissatisfied with the original simplicity of ancient popular recollections, testimonies, and emblems of faith, and therefore painted them over with glaring colours and disfigured them with a

glittering frame. Now, however, the pious hand of the historically trained scholar will conjure up again the old and the genuine from beneath the later additions, and will replace the modern frame with a fresh wreath of olive or Galilean anemone. The whole interpretation of the New Testament, ceasing to be dogmatic interpolation and becoming historical and psychological exegesis, will supply what the New Testament itself hints, but most books on the New Testament do not hint, namely, the historical explanation why Christianity brought about the transformation of the world's religion. And we may add here in parenthesis: this kind of interpretation will do much more for practical Christianity at the present day than the dogmatic exegesis which evaporates the spirit to get at the doctrine. Spiritual forces which had been artificially kept in check will be set free, and will flow forth from the Old Book, bringing life to the new age.

The great work which is to be done on the New Testament divides up into a multitude of separate problems, philological, literary, and religious. In all these single problems, however, about which we will not speak here, one work will be of the greatest value, the compilation of which is at present the most important task awaiting New Testament theology, and on which in conclusion

we have something to say more in detail. We refer to the New Testament dictionary.

What is a Dictionary? In most people's opinion it is something very simple: an alphabetical list of foreign words, Latin, French, Italian, or what not, with their meanings. It is something perfectly simple, therefore; a book, we may add, which many persons even of liberal education regard as possessing primarily no strict scientific interest, but as designed only for the practical necessities of life; just like, let us say, a railway time-table or a directory, a handsome volume to the eye, but within rather a mechanical than a learned production. Or, perhaps, at the word 'dictionary' we think of the days when, poring over Cæsar's account of the construction of the Rhine bridge, and coming across a most unpleasant number of hard words, we opened the dictionary and in a moment knew what this or that peculiar word meant. All of which is indeed extraordinarily simple, at least for any one who knows his A B C and so much more as to be aware that he must look for the word *trabs* under the letter T.

In striking contrast with the widespread learned depreciations of the dictionary is an equally widespread servile submission to the single explanations of the dictionary. 'Here is the word; that must be the meaning,' is the thought of thousands who,

having a foreign word to interpret, fly to consult the dictionary.

The scientific view and scientific lexicography begin, on the other hand, as soon as it is acknowledged misleading to think that the meaning of a word can be at once read out from the book, or as soon as it is recognized that every word has its history, and that we may not venture to speak learnedly about a word until its history has been explained, *i.e.* its origin and the fortunes which have determined its meaning or meanings. This, then, is the task of scientific lexicography: to trace the history of words from the earliest times represented by our materials—nay, more: from the primitive stage of the language which comparative philology enables us to reconstruct hypothetically —down to the moment when we find the words in use by any given speaker or writer.

Thus, though it has many mechanical accessories, and though the usual system of alphabetical arrangement is based on practical, not on scientific considerations, lexicography is an historical science. It is the historical census of the vocabulary.

As an historical science it is of quite recent growth. Lexicons have been in use for thousands of years; historical dictionaries have only existed since last century. Two of the newest great dictionaries, neither of them yet finished, may be

mentioned by way of example: the dictionary of the Egyptian language prepared by the Berlin Academy of Sciences, and the great Latin dictionary promoted by an association of various academies, the *Thesaurus Linguæ Latinæ*.

There is also a Greek Thesaurus, a large, expensive work in nine folio volumes, but it in no way satisfies the requirements of scientific lexicography, and is in every respect obsolete. The same applies to all other Greek dictionaries, even the *Mega Lexikon* now publishing at Athens, which is great indeed, but not a lexicon. All things considered, we may pass this judgment on Greek lexicography at the present day: that probably no other department of classical philology is in an equally backward state.

And then these Greek dictionaries, that were already antiquated on the day of their publication, were fated to witness the period of epigraphy and papyrus research. It was as though the director of a museum, who had covered every square yard of his poor, badly lighted galleries with old paintings, often wrongly labelled, were suddenly to receive a donation of hundreds more pictures of great age. The director wrings his hands and asks where he is to put all the treasures. Greek lexicography has not yet been able to open new rooms for the enormous increase of material due to the

new discoveries,[1] and so all the precious gifts, literally gifts of the Danai, are still in their packing-cases in the corridors and yards, and no one knows when it will be possible for the museum attendants to come with the hammer and crowbar.

The fate of Greek lexicography as a whole has been shared also by that special branch of it called New Testament lexicography.

New Testament or, more generally speaking, Biblical lexicography has an extensive past. The Jew Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of St. Paul, was probably the author of a lexical work on the proper names of the Old Testament. The Library of the University of Heidelberg possesses a third or fourth century papyrus fragment of an old Christian lexicon, also dealing with the explanation of the Hebrew names, and probably connected somehow or other with Philo's work.[2]

But New Testament lexicography proper is not yet 300 years old. The first special dictionary of the New Testament was published by Georg

[1] What constitutes a very meritorious beginning is the painstaking work of the venerable Dutch scholar, H. van Herwerden, *Lexicon græcum suppletorium et dialecticum*, Lugduni Batavorum, 1902; to which the same author added an *Appendix*, Lugduni Batavorum, 1904.

[2] Published with facsimile and commentary by the present author in *Veröffentlichungen aus der Heidelberger Papyrus-Sammlung*, I. *Die Septuaginta-Papyri, etc.*, Heidelberg, 1905, pp. 86–93.

Pasor at Herborn in 1619, and had a long history. In edition after edition, for over a century and a half, it regulated the New Testament studies of many generations. Besides the large edition two abridgments of different sizes were called for. Though nearly all that Georg Pasor was able to ascertain with the resources at his disposal is now obsolete, we nevertheless look back with gratitude upon the lifework which the hard-working scholar accomplished first at Herborn and then, during the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, at Franeker in Friesland

After Pasor there came a long series of New Testament dictionaries. The last, and probably also the best, was that by the American scholar Joseph Henry Thayer, an independent revision of the excellent New Testament dictionary by Wilibald Grimm. Thayer closes the older period of New Testament lexicography, and it is an honour to American Biblical scholarship that the close was so brilliant. The more recent editions of the dictionary of the late Greifswald Professor of Theology, Hermann Cremer, which, on the whole, rests rather on a dogmatic than on an historical foundation, constitute, despite occasional borrowings from inscriptions and papyri, no real advance on Grimm and Thayer.

Of course these dictionaries compiled by the

older generation also witnessed the renaissance of Greek philology due to the discovery and working-up of the new linguistic remains, and for no other book in the world are the inscriptions, papyri, etc., so valuable in lexical matters as for the New Testament.

The situation, therefore, from the scholar's point of view, is here the same as in general Greek lexicography, namely, the new epoch calls imperatively for a new dictionary of the New Testament.

What is the new dictionary to do? It must give a trustworthy account of the history of each of the five or six thousand words in the New Testament, and show particularly in what senses these words were used at the time in the East and West of the Greek-speaking world. For both of these purposes the new texts, with which the lexicographers could not or would not trouble themselves, must be worked through page by page and line by line. Hundreds of separate facts will thus be noted in a few days; as the years go by the amount of material excerpted on paper-slips will swell to thousands and tens of thousands of observations. But the book will also be distinguished by its freshness and directness of treatment. Where formerly we had only a collection of casual items, we shall now discover lines of relationship

stretching through the centuries. This may be shown by a comparatively simple example. At the beginning of Chapter IV. we quoted the words of Jesus about 'benefactors.' He refers to the custom, common in that age, of bestowing on men who had deserved well of the public the title of εὐεργέτης. This custom was already familiar to us from the writers of the time, but how much more lifelike and real does it become when, by studying the Eastern and Western commemorative inscriptions and the coins, we are able to trace it for eight centuries on the monuments themselves. The New Testament dictionary will, therefore, have to quote the inscriptions and coins as well as the literary evidence,[1] *e.g.* the Thessalian Sotairos inscription of the 5th cent. B.C.; inscriptions from Delphi, *circa* 370 B.C.; from Olus (in Crete), 3rd cent. B.C.; Delphi, 3rd cent. B.C.; Amorgos, about the middle of the 2nd cent. B.C.; coin (from Ptolemäis-Akko) of Alexandros I., Bala, 150–145 B.C.; coin (from Tyre) of Antiochus VII., 141–129 B.C.; coin of the same king from Arados in Phœnicia; inscriptions from Kotyrta in Laconia, 1st cent. B.C.; Methana, end of 1st cent. B.C.; Delphi, beginning of 1st cent. A.D.; Ancyra, *temp.*

[1] Of course, every inscription will be quoted with a reference to the work in which it is published. We have omitted the references here for the sake of brevity.

Trajan; Bedir-Bey, in Caria, imperial period; Goel-Bazar, in Bithynia, between 102 and 114 A.D.; Tchoukour-Keui, in Bithynia, 210–211 A.D.; Miletus, *circa* 250 A.D.

Are these too many examples? We believe that no trouble can be too great when the object is to re-create the background to any saying of Jesus. And the object is, moreover, in every case to determine how men of the early age understood and were bound to understand the New Testament. Hence the list of examples has to be continued into the second and third century A.D.

Not till the material has been collected by dint of much patient toil—the lexicographer's field is the world—shall we be able to venture on the final stage: to reconstruct the background of Primitive Christianity out of all the hundreds and thousands of paper-slips by writing the MS. of the New Testament dictionary.

Nevertheless we run a grave risk, to which many a scholar has succumbed, of losing ourselves and our individuality under the burden of paper-slips—and that in an age which looks for men who can do something more than arrange slips and correct proofs. In the midst of such work we perhaps hear it asked whether he who prunes a vine, goes down into a coal-mine, binds up a scalded limb, or helps to reclaim a depraved man, does not do

more for humanity than the man who intends to write a new book, adding one more to the hundred thousand volumes which, like an inherited encumbrance, enslave our race in bondage to the past . . .—No, not merely enslave, but also educate by the example of the past.

Therefore there remains to the scholar amid the paper-slips and the dust of his workroom the certainty that his work on the past is helping to put old truths once more into circulation, setting free old forces for the service of the new times. And so the day may come when the word Thesaurus—literally 'treasure'—may also be applied to the dictionary which New Testament scholarship claims as its own. If it does not itself constitute a treasure, it will at least facilitate access to the treasury from which for well-nigh two thousand years humanity has drawn coined gold.

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